

# THE SECOND PERSON SINGULAR

AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

ALICE MEYNELL

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TO CELIA CLARK



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*The papers which follow have been chosen from those of Mrs. Meynell's literary essays that have not yet been reprinted in book-form. The selection has been made at the instance of the Oxford University Press.*

## SUPERFLUOUS KINGS

Which had superfluous kings for messengers  
Not many moons gone by.

*Antony and Cleopatra.*

As the kings lag, and then pass away from the stage of the world, many men will ask what there is to regret. Assuredly nothing, if not royalty in the mind of Shakespeare. Mankind will in time probably forget or deny that there was ever anything in the life of the world answering to Shakespeare's royalty in Perdita, or to his princeliness in Arviragus and Guiderius, or to his kingliness in Lear, or to his glory in Cleopatra. It may be so, as to the world; there may have been nothing thus answerable. But there was Shakespeare.

And our regrets in regard to him cover all his regalities—the hidden and hereditary and unconscious, and the conscious and braggart and manifest: Perdita's dignity among the romps, and her sportive disputes as to Art and Nature among the clowns, her unflushed composure amid the junketings, and also Lear's loud and indignant death. The splendour of Shakespeare's veneration for kings is perhaps deeper where the kingliness—the blood of it—is unrevealed, as in the shepherdess of *The Winter's Tale*, for here it is matter of Shakespeare's faith. So with the brothers of Imogen who,

by the way—and not merely by the way—like her, discuss flowers—‘Then to arms!’ They too have the implicit distinction, unknown to the world of their exile, but known to Shakespeare, who is aware of their blood and lineage. Here, and in *The Winter’s Tale*, Shakespeare makes his resolute and implicit act of belief in the blood of kings.

In *Lear* that faith suffers outrage and defies it. Many years ago the great actor, Rossi, who did not gain in England such honour as was rendered to Salvini—I fear because his physical personal dignity was not so obvious as Salvini’s—played King Lear in Italian. But there was one cry, one royal proclamation, that could not be removed from the English. So Rossi said ‘every inch’ in English. It needed Shakespeare’s word to vindicate Shakespeare’s royalism. (One might make sport of any kind of translation: say ‘*ogni centimetro*’—‘every centimetre a king’ is good farce.) No Italian will serve; the Latin mind has not this degree of imaginative reverence, nor has the Italian language the faculty of giving sudden greatness to a customary word.

But Shakespeare, conceiving for royalty not only ‘the beauteous Majesty of Denmark’, and the ‘courteous action’ of the dead—‘being so majestic’—and the dignity of Hermione’s daughter, and the tempest of Lear’s elemental tragedy, will not consent to touch us with nothing more than pity and terror. He confronts us with the uttermost of pride of life in the royalty he sings; confronts us—



no, rather brings us to our knees before the arrogant splendour he conceives :

Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,  
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze.

It is the pride of life and the pride of death. Only hand in hand with a queen does Antony venture on the prophecy of that immortal vanity. If to him are given the most surprising lines in any of the tragedies, it is only as the lover of a queen that he has the right to them. To him is assigned that startling word, the incomparable word of amorous and tender ceremony—' Egypt '.

I am dying, Egypt, dying.

That territorial name, murmured to his love in the hour of death, and in her arms—I know not in the records of all genius any other such august farewell. Lear's word is outdone here. Lear a king in every inch of his aged body, but Cleopatra a queen in every league of her ancient realm. Has not majesty spoken its one unexpected word in the mouth of such a lover ?

Superfluous kings—Shakespeare's irony could find no other adjective so overcharged with insolence as this. Kings must be as he conceived them in order to that antithesis :

Superfluous kings for messengers.

But an antithesis more complete than that of downfall and of servitude is that of mortality. The

humiliation of the beaten monarch leaves the Shakespearian conception of kingliness face to face with the mere fortunes of war ; the derision of the word ' superfluous ' implies, in reversal, an inalienable dignity ; so in the act of dying, the visible act, done in life ; so with ' sad stories of the death of kings '. The final contradiction is not here ; but in the grave itself, in the hidden burial, out of the sight of the populace : it needs the utmost of Shakespeare's passion of royalty to answer to that depth. And here is poetry, not by him, but wonderfully worthy of him, that tells us of

High-born dust

In vaults, thin courts of poor unflattered kings.

Shakespeare only, besides Young, could have written this.

Literature, then, will lose this glory, and with this glory this humiliation. Who will say which is greater, the thesis or the antithesis ? But they cannot be parted to be compared. There they are, in our national literature, and cannot be effaced. But who shall hinder their becoming, for the student, first a matter of mere literary interest, then a matter of mere literary curiosity, next a matter of some new derision ? (We need no new derisions : our wits are apt to mockery.) Is it well that any one of Shakespeare's many passions should come under our frigid inspection, to be examined so ?

When kings are in fact superfluous, Shake-

Shakespeare's great word 'superfluous' will be cancelled out; when kings are no longer flattered, Young's great word 'unflattered' will be a futile word; when there are no full assiduous courts, the 'thin courts' will suggest no spectres. Regret is for Shakespeare, as has been said; not for Saul, or Louis the Fourteenth, or Charles the Twelfth. But, short of Shakespeare's devotion, there will be some sentiment damaged. When the mortality of kings is no sharper sarcasm than is the mortality we all inherit, then the lamps and the gold that enshrine the bony heads of Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar at Cologne may take their place, outside of cathedrals, with the unnamed relics of the shepherds who preceded the kings to the manger.

Shakespeare's greatest splendour, then, that so shines down the splendour of history and the world, is under sentence, and under sentence his greatest compassion, and under sentence his greatest terror, and under sentence his greatest irony. And I have placed at the head of these pages a word of neither terror nor compassion, because the word of irony implies the rest.

## STRICTLY AN ELIZABETHAN LYRIST

ENGLAND has little primitive poetry, because the Reformers not only broke graven images but destroyed libraries, and gave some centuries of minor literature to the flames. We have much ado in raking together a few stones of their hacking and scattering, but fire has saved their posterity the trouble of trying to restore an annihilated national poetry. Our writers, then (with the obvious exceptions), begin soon after the invention of movable type, and so modern are they that the sixteenth century must serve us for comparative antiquity. The language was mobile between Elizabeth and James, tuned by the hands of the masters whose lives lasted from one developing time into another, and who were themselves England, having history in common with their country.

But Robert Greene was absolutely an Elizabethan—man and boy. He was born in the year of the Queen's accession, and died while she was dancing, an old man of thirty-four, dropsical and horrible, full of repentance, as were then all of his manner of life when they had an illness sufficiently long to give them time. Greene died from too much banqueting, apparently upon the crudest luxuries, but his sorry death-bed gave him room for ample self-reproach, and doubtless Christopher Marlowe

also would have left a record of his repentance had the manner of his departure, at even an earlier age than his friend's, been less violent. In later years Carew asked pardon, with many cries, for the greater number of his verses; and, indeed, during these two bright centuries you may hear, if you turn your ear that way, the loud lamentation of poet after dying poet, a single outcry at intervals; not a death-bed without the clamour that closed the song. It is a parting cry, so poignant and sudden that the air rings with it even while the succeeding singer is heard to be precluding, undaunted for the present. Greene had not a little to repent of in his actions, but nothing to retract in his songs; therefore, the reader who has not beheld his life—his wife was left at 'six and seven', as he phrases it, and certainly very forlorn—has little to do with the grief, pain, and fear of the closing scene, and may well be content with the sweetness of the songs. They were sweet and single, like tunes unharmonized. Without following the fashion of using the terms of one art to describe another, we may permit ourselves this mere imagery: the single note of music to represent the sixteenth-century lyric, harmonies for the seventeenth, counterpoint for the nineteenth. Greene's famous 'Sephestia's Song to Her Child' (by far his best) is the only lyric in which so much as two notes are to be heard; and the double string makes the sound more human.

It is not human to be single as the songs of

Greene are single; the fading of pleasure, the cruelty of beauty, the inconstancy of love, the happy lot of the shepherd, and the cares of kings—each thing, one at a time, is so unaccompanied that you wonder how a primitive poet should have had time to reject all checking, mingling, and qualifying thoughts together. For it is hardly youth, hardly inexperience that this simplicity suggests, but rather a mind made up, a mind bent on creating other conditions than those which govern an actual world of which the poet has somewhat grown tired.

‘Sephestia’s Song’, however, has the thrill of sweetly jarring notes in the lines that tell the parting of father and mother over their laughing child—lines that seem to have haunted the ear, if not the mind, of Blake in his own song of birth. Blake’s verse has a tempestuous and threatening spiritual wildness of which Greene did not know the language; and it is only in the leaping metre, the clamour of the rhymes that seem striving to be heard above a deafening childish noise, that the two songs have so much likeness.

The wanton smiled, father wept,  
Mother cried, baby leapt;  
More he crowed, more we cried.

There is a vociferation, a distraction, and a dandling of the child, and you hear also the crying that the mother is seeking to still with her recital of that late scene of sorrow—‘Weep not, my wanton’.

Next in beauty to 'Sephestia's Song' comes, perhaps, 'The Praise of Faunia':

Ah, were she pitiful as she is fair,  
Or but as mild as she is seeming so,

is a beginning that sounds like a less grave, less strong, and less masculine Shakespeare sonnet. There is sweet line after line in this poem, and many such a phrase as 'the morning-singer's swelling throat' and 'When she sings, all singers else be still!' But the poem is famous chiefly, it may be guessed, for the sake of the final couplet, which has a far more modern kind of ample and intelligible beauty:

O glorious sun, imagine me the west!  
Shine in my arms, and set thou in my breast!

Next comes that pretty song 'Radagon in Dianam', which is to be praised not as a whole, but for some stanzas in which the cypresses keep a golden sun away from a 'valley gaudy green', and from nymphs in white. There never was any scene at once warmer and more fresh. The fountain is cool in a shade that the sun never shot an arrow through, but the sense of outer sunshine is intense and clear, and the dark trees seem to flame blackly, as they do on such a sky. 'Outer darkness', by the way, is a familiar phrase, but 'outer sunshine' is a presence hardly removed in the southern summer.

This vivid impression from Greene's poem is caused by the most careless of verses. As a lyrist,

he never leant hard upon anything; he has the lightest foot, and seems rather to whistle than to sing his tunes upon the way. So lightly is the verse given to the wind that you are apt to read it as carelessly, and so to lose something. This Song of the Fountain, for instance, should be read with more leisure than at a glance it seems to merit.

Greene is dull to any reader who does not take the pains to cancel all the conventions of the times that followed his Elizabethan day. The pure fountains, the nymphs, and the other valleys, gaudy green, must be simply forgotten; and the task is not difficult. Greene has all the good luck by his Elizabethanism—inalienable good luck, which was neither to be repeated by others, nor to be taken from his own head upon whom it alighted first. We, who have been wearied by succeeding nymphs, need not be wearied by those nymphs that were his—and this not because his were best, but because his were first.

See now how he made the mere Cupid childish, wild, and dear:

Cupid abroad was lated in the night,  
His wings were wet with ranging in the rain.

But it is hardly possible not to find him somewhat dull, especially when he is not at his best, because he has so little to say. There never was a poet who said less. These poems of his, after all, were, in his own estimation, not important enough to be written for their own sake; they were but snatches of songs



in his prose writings—novels and what not ; and poems so set flying at any other time and in any other English could not have kept their motion and their spirit so long. They never cost him a thought ; and the only sign of attention is in the versification. This is by no means always good, but in ‘ Radagon in Dianam ’ it is very good indeed ; the foot is elastic and moves with a rebound.

But as to thoughts, he is at small expense. Take his charming description of ‘ A Shepherd and His Wife ’. As though in the idleness of an empty mind, he lets his eyes note what is really hardly matter for verse—the way, for example, in which the flaps of the shepherd’s coat were turned over. It is grotesque to produce a rhyme for such a detail as that. But in the same poem are some lively verses about the wife which seem not only to set her up for admiration and delight, but to dance about her in a round when that is done.

Nor is there more in ‘ The Shepherd Wife’s Song ’, in which the happiest shepherdess in Thessaly compares her love and state with those of queens, and makes her boast sweetly and with a pretty and apt refrain. But ‘ Fair Samela ’—oftener quoted—has a weakness and listlessness that spoil its grace ; and, after this, what is left ? Robert Greene was a small poet among the minor poets ; but his hour struck in the cool of the morning, and, whatever kind of simplicity was in his mind, the authentic simplicity was in his English.

## ‘ A MODERN POETESS ’

THE cruel places of history are for ever emptied of their suffering tenants, and it is only to our inappeasable sympathies that the lifelong prisoners seem to be recaptured, sent back to their intolerable hours and places, long after they have once for all, unchallenged, passed the guard. Every martyrdom of the past has ceased to be ; it concerns no one how sharp, how insupportable it was in its day. There is no living pain now in all the universe to continue it, to answer it, to rehearse it, or perhaps to regret it. And if we complain that the past is not to be revoked or undone, we might rather confess the complete consolation of the passing of time, the undoing, the effacement, and the more than death. It is only by moments that we apprehend what it is to be past, or that we perceive how clean is natural oblivion ; the uneasy human retrospection stirs nothing but itself, and wounds the now living heart with a present pity for that which is not. Nothing now on earth remembers.

The popular phrase is expressive : ‘ I know the thing is over and done ; but it afflicts me to think of it.’ So we acknowledge that there is no trouble but in the present, and that though our minds seem to travel into the past, in truth they do not budge ; and we, prisoners of our own moment, are fluttered

with the present sympathy, and not with the vanished sorrow, for this is not.

By far the greater number of human sufferings have been forgotten by man as purely and freshly as by nature. Of a few, that fictitious memory which is history and tradition renews the report with so much attention as to preserve something like the dramatic unity of time. To read of them and to think of them is nearly as long as it was to endure them. But of others again we have the brief record that shows long hollow spaces of time, perfectly dark and undescribed. Among these is the bitter life and death of Arabella Stuart, told by our popular historians in a short paragraph that ends with her death of a ‘ broken heart ’—the extravagant phrase interrupting the historical style and making the page conspicuous to childish learners.

Evelyn has her in his list of learned women, although she is not in the catalogue of those whom he sacrificed at one blow to the glory of the Duchess of Newcastle. ‘ Hilpylas, the mother-in-law of the young Plinie, Cornelia so neere the greate Scipio,’ and Lucretia Marinella, who is not mentioned as any one’s mother-in-law, but as the author of a work *Dell’ excellenzia delle Donne, con difetti e mancamenti degli Huomini*—with the inferiority of these and such as these does he flatter the surpassing Duchess. The sorrows of Arabella Stuart would have made her name too sad a sacrifice for

such a train. The other ladies are presented gaily and as it were in garlands : ' They possess but that divided which your Grace retaines in one.'

Nevertheless, Arabella was, even for an age when women of station were well taught, notable for her education. Her Latin letters are still there to attest it. She was named a 'modern poetess' by Mr. Philips, who was Milton's nephew. These secondary, second-hand, relative distinctions are in touching disproportion with her original, immediate, and authentic sufferings. The delicately sharp edging that a more or less literary training gives to the natural human mind, making it aware, had been given to hers ; and she was so prepared by delicate erudition that the loss of all she loved was complete to her, the suspense of imprisonment inconsolable, and its idleness more than mortal. She lost better than her life, for the prison ruined her reason before it released her body, twice rifled and destitute, and dismissed it to Westminster Abbey and the grave.

It is in her letters to her husband, and only in these, that Arabella Stuart is perceptible as she lived. The letters of entreaty to King James are the letters of those abject times. They declare her to be in despair, not because of the separation from her husband and only friend, and not because of her solitude in perpetual prison, but on account of the King's disfavour, of her exile from his presence, and by reason of the remorse and contrition of one

who had disobeyed him, even unwittingly. By these forms of ignominy did men and women rule, not their phrases only, but, apparently, their very thoughts. Such declarations were much more than a courtesy due to kings or the decorum of a style in letter-writing. Hearts beat hard to that most grotesque tune; those were real self-reproaches; they banished real sleep, human sleep, afflicted real consciences, set the tears of men running, and squandered and scattered to waste that human treasure, humility.

Lady Arabella's remorse, as she took leave to remind the King, was poignant for her offence in having bestowed herself in marriage *upon the King's permission*. He seems to have either forgotten or silently rescinded his consent, and for this she overwhelmed herself in professions of regret and promises of obedience. She sent to the Queen some little pieces of needlework, the sewing of which, she said, had beguiled the time ‘for her whose serious mind must invent some relaxation’. ‘Womanish toys’, she called them, conscious of her education, and she thanked the gentleman who was her gaoler for consenting to present them. Her way of submission was even approved by the tyrant. One of her letters to the King, said Montford, ‘was penned by her in the best terms, as she can do right well. It was often read without offence; nay, it was even commended by his Highness, with the applause of Prince and Council.’ The best

terms are of course the most reverent. The clergy exhorted her with one voice. The stricter keeping, to which she so dreaded to be consigned as to fall ill of fear, was that of the Bishop of Durham.

She had the heart to deny her commended letters so far as to practise some secret disobedience, heaping up self-reproach for the vigils of her solitude. The letters to her husband, from whom she had been parted after but a few months of marriage, were contraband. Even in these, her allusions to the King were most dutiful, but her husband was her theme. ' Rachel wept,' she wrote, ' and would not be comforted, because her children were no more. And that, indeed, is the remedyless sorrow, and none else ! And, therefore, God bless us from that, and I will hope well for the rest, though I see no apparent hope.' Her husband was ill, as she heard from others. ' Sir,' she wrote, ' I am exceedingly sorry to hear that you have not been well. I am not satisfied with the reason Smith gives for it ; but, if it be a cold, I will impute it to some sympathy betwixt us, having myself gotten a swollen cheek at the same time with a cold. For God's sake, let not your grief of mind work upon your body. You may see by me what inconvenience it will bring one to ; and no fortune, I assure you, daunts me so much as that weakness of body I find in myself ; for " si nous vivons l'âge d'un veau ", as Marot says, we may, by God's grace, be happier than we look for, in being suffered to enjoy ourself

with his Majesty's favour. But if we be not able to live it, I, for my part, shall think myself a pattern of misfortune, in enjoying so great a blessing as you so little while.'

Again, she reminded him that he had not written to her 'this good while'. 'You see when I am troubled, I trouble you with tedious kindness, for so I think you will account so long a letter. But, sweet Sir, I speak not this to trouble you with writing but when you please. Be well, and I shall account myself happy in being your faithful and loving wife.'

As soon as these letters were discovered the writing was stopped. Enough was written, and enough even remains, to show the spirit, generous, worthy of liberty, capable of gaiety, forced to grief, of this unfortunate. A graver revolt against her tyrants was her escape to join her husband in flight from the Tower. Ill fortune set all the times, tides, and winds wrong on that unhappy adventure. She would not save herself without him. She was brought back, and from the new imprisonment there was no escape. The indignant King satisfied justice by refusing another little offering of her needlework. In her appeal to the Queen she had entreated that the gloves she had made might be accepted 'in remembrance of the poor prisoner that wrought them, in hopes her royal hands will vouchsafe to wear them, which, till I have the honour to kiss, I shall live in a great deal of sorrow'.

'In all humility, the most wretched and unfortunate creature that ever lived prostrates itself at the feet of the most merciful King that ever was.' These are among the last 'best terms' that Arabella Stuart penned.

Her King and Queen and country sent her civilization into solitude, gagged her classics, disproved her poetry, and thrust her 'expanded mind' into the inner darkness.



## TO ITALY WITH EVELYN

Is any one so courageous as to wish for a glimpse of the city and the landscape of the future, two centuries and a half hence? Even if so, he can hardly desire it so warmly as the fainter-hearted desires the sight of the past. At any rate, if there be any scene that we would willingly be admitted to see as it is to be, that scene is not in Italy.

Thither would we willingly journey not later than in the day of John Evelyn, when he travelled in his youthful dignity, provided with letters, and spent some seasons in Rome, and studied for a year at the University of Padua. Every one knows his journal of the English Church under the Commonwealth, of the Plague, of the Fire, of the Court of Charles II. But not the least charming part of one of the most readable of books—a book written in an English prose that had not yet undergone much manipulation, but was still a little rigid, but rigid with vitality—is somewhat neglected; it is the part that records this progress through France to the Coast, and thence into Italy as far as Naples, and home by Venice, the Lakes, the Simplon Pass, and Switzerland. The happy man! When he drew near, after peril of shipwreck, to the port of Genoa, he ‘perfectly smelt the joyes of Italy’. This was off the noble village of Sanpierdarena, where now

you may smell the odour of factories—soap-boiling and other things—for it has lately come to be stifled with thick smoke, and the mountain gardens are dying with their blackened arbours. Only of late have those ancient, coloured terraces, coloured as a few masterly landscapes are painted, so that a little of the canvas, or a little of the view, might be set in a ring and worn as a jewel—only of late have the gardens, once in rich and fortunate neglect, ceased to breathe their ancient breath.

‘ We recovered the shore, which we now kept in view within half a league, in sight of those pleasant villas, and within scent of those fragrant orchards which are on this coast, full of princely retirements for the sumptuousnesse of their buildings and noblesse of the plantations, from whence, the wind blowing as it did, might perfectly be smelt the joyes of Italy, in the perfumes of orange, citron, and jasmine flowers for divers leagues seaward.’ And Evelyn was so much struck by the aura of this coast as to record it again in the dedication of his ‘ *Fumifugium* ’ to Charles II. What has befallen Sanpiero-darena—that one place precisely, of all others—in the years just past makes the whole incident of this welcoming message from the cultivated lands, and of the ensuing treatise and its title, sound somewhat cruel in irony.

John Evelyn tried in vain to stay the approaching smoke, as he tried also—by an application to the same monarch—to avert the course of fashion

in the then important dress of men. The East he thought better worth following than France, and he proposed a whole revision of the Western mode, and presented the King with a plan whereby the trivial fashions of 'the monsieurs' were to be exchanged for an Oriental 'noblesse'. Charles accepted the pamphlet, and was soon after seen to wear a Persian robe; but he rather shabbily left Evelyn to conjecture, in silence, that it was his advice that had been taken. In the end, the King slid back, and 'the monsieurs' had it. If John Evelyn had had that glimpse into the future which few of us desire to-day, how could he have endured those French inventions to which the East has now been partly converted, and the fumes of that ash-strewn piece of coast? 'But a soap-factory!' cries the English reader, seeing all kinds of happy national sarcasm in the industry that, among others, has brought about this special local change. It happens, however, pat to this matter of soap, that Evelyn makes a note to the effect that he bought, in one of the towns of North Italy, certain 'wash-balls' which seemed to be new to him; he speaks of them as a useful invention. Before the factory had taken the place of the fragrant orchards the people of that coast had the constant custom of washing all their clothes. It is much to be feared that the smoke of the soap-factory has already put an end to that habit by making it too difficult, or impossible.

Some consolation is to be found in this—that if a mile of that incomparable coast is spoilt, there remain scores of miles all untouched, differing only in the lesser majesty of the houses and gardens with their great sea-walls. The ‘sumptuousnesse’ admired by Evelyn will never be restored; but of the mere walls of those rougher houses too, in their place in the landscape, pieces might be set as jewels. It was always in praise of gardens that Evelyn wrote. Otherwise the general modern complaint as to the insensibility of the older writers to the daily splendours of nature is hardly unjust in his case. He, without noting, saw the change of skies that sets alight the world when you have crossed the Alps; and of the further illumination of a southern spring he says nothing; but he makes mention of the ‘extraordinary long’ tail of a horse, which he saw in a collection of curiosities, nor do two horns of as many unicorns go unrecorded, for he had a grave and simple admiration of such things as petrifications, flies in amber, and all minor marvels. Nor does he cease to be a learned and most responsible man, in whose adult but innocent style we are to see nothing contrary to the dignities of State and office. The false air of childishness which this kind of English gives to the style of Pepys always makes his public functions and honours seem to us incongruous. In Evelyn’s *Diary*, by the way, we meet Mr. Pepys, about some Admiralty business, with so much solemnity that we hardly know him again.

It is Italy that seems (by her people) to have an air of childishness in our eyes to-day. I have to confess that when I hear an Italian say something to the purpose I always cry inwardly 'How intelligent!' But in those days England took frankly a lower place. It could not be otherwise, seeing that the late Renaissance as it was then in Rome had imposed law and taste upon the whole of Europe. Evelyn had nothing whatever to be proud of at home, inasmuch as he was ashamed of York Minster, Lincoln, Durham, and the rest; inasmuch, too, as Shakespeare's name occurs not once in his book. He never doubts that modern art had reached its culmination in St. Peter's and the Lateran, in Guido Reni and Domenichino.

He found all those splendours new, and it is no wonder if he was convinced that all this art in course of progress, as it was visibly, must be better integrally than what had gone before. He took no notice of the earlier masters of any of the schools, but admired precisely as Horace Walpole admired, and on the same scale and according to the same order. He was diligent in the galleries, but the student of to-day is dismayed to see no Botticelli up or down the page, and to find the polite English traveller in rapture before the blatant Bernini.

Englishmen, in a word, paid Italy the great compliment of taking her at the highest estimation as she was at the moment. There was no painful comparison with any period of the past, for we have

evidence in his works that Bernini was not afraid of antiquity itself. In arts, in letters, in arms, in science especially, Italy was foremost in present action—*there* was her splendour, as we may find it hard to realize. Evelyn sent home preparations from her schools of anatomy to the Royal Society, to which such things were new.

And as to the gardens, happy was this traveller, who was soon after to plan the hedges and alleys of Wotton and of Sayes Court, in such a school of gardens. He had, in England, to contend with the perpetual inequalities which have hardly been sufficiently recognized as distinctive of our plains. In Italy he found the plains to be flat with that peculiar sub-alpine flatness, and the roads straight. Most beautiful with the mountains for a distance—but he hardly had eyes for the mountains. It is rather difficult to forgive him for calling the rocks and bays of the coast ‘horrid gaps’ and ‘dreadful mountains’; but ‘Oh, the sweet Paradise!’ he cries among the fountains and the vines.

His was a clear spirit. Wherever he journeyed he went upright; and if we desire to travel with him into Italy, it is not only for the sake of his Italy but for the sake of himself. Something we would have from him in exchange for our better information on the ‘Gotik ordonance’.

## WATERFALLS

‘ WE then went out to see a cascade. I trudged unwillingly, and was not sorry to find it dry.’ Dr. Johnson was not often pleased, it seems, upon this tour in Wales in the company of ‘ my mistress ’ and her family, and the arid waterfall was no doubt a welcome incident, for the scenery had been tedious to his spirit. He made light of the mountains, and did not hesitate to propose a strange image to the fancy of his companions when he derided a river unlucky enough to come into the prospect : ‘ Why, sir, I could clear any part of it by a leap.’ He rated very low the old house of Mrs. Thrale’s family, though as a house it amused him more than any view. ‘ The addition of another storey would make an useful house, but it cannot be great.’ The old parish clerk who, seeing Mrs. Thrale again, ‘ foolishly said that he was now willing to die,’ is no doubt justly rebuked ; but so seems to be Mrs. Thrale herself : ‘ He had only a crown given him by my mistress.’ Then there was that dispute on the Chester walls ; and, first and last, Dr. Johnson was not found to be best of companions by the ‘ pretty woman ’ witty enough to ‘ add something to the conversation ’, with whom he himself would have been all content.

There is reason to think that scenery in those

days was rather unfairly and dully insisted upon as a matter of taste. 'Dispositions of wood and water' were the subjects of a kind of expert study, and it is easy to understand what a bore a landscape might become under the eye of a judge. Miss Austen shows a distinct tendency to bring water, rising ground, and well-wooded slopes under review. If a modern mansion has been erected, with ignorance, in too low a situation, she has an instant eye for the barbarism. The shrubberies, the curving carriage drives, the conifers, the farm-buildings, if any, duly planted out, come under the rapid approval of an elegant mind, and so does the far prospect no less. The distance is declared to be in harmony with the demands of a lover of nature; and as you read you can hardly think of the scenery as thrilled with summer wind, or believe that its miles would mark human feet with dust, or would be measured by the wavering rods of human weariness, or subject to any incidents except those of a careful engraving. There is some charm in the false-classical landscape of that time, merely looked back upon; but it would be something less than interesting to be presently in the company of people who talked much of the dispositions of wood and water. There is a certain way of looking at a view that affects one almost with dismay to hear of. When a professor of scenery asks you to enjoy what he always calls a peep, with several kinds of fir-trees coyly betraying the way to it, there is little delight



there ; nor are cottages so pleasant when they, too, are said to peep ; but this is a later and even a duller fancy. Landscape a hundred years ago had more dignity, though no more ' spirit in the woods '.

If the dispositions of wood and water allowed of a waterfall, it is impossible to imagine a more welcome addition at that day to scenery constructed, like Mr. Pecksniff's younger daughter, upon good principles. The cascade had not yet been made quite a common convention, for the ' picturesque ' had not then come and gone, making dull in its passage, at least in art and in letters, the sallies of nature. To find a waterfall, in the right place, was in those days an elegant and natural joy ; and it must have been no small disappointment to see Dr. Johnson trudging unwillingly. But no doubt there had been too much said.

Taste, always so nearly in peril of derogation, and, in fact, so quickly, according to all experience, dimmed by habit, has done wrong, by its weak preferences, to all the flowers of scenery—not to the actual flowers of vegetation only, though these have long been turned to the basest uses of all decoration—but to the other outbreaks of the movement and vitality of earth. The white tops of mountains and the climax of storms, forests in their utmost leaf, waves at the crest, the clouds of sunset newly on fire, waters in 'haste—what a gathering of blossoms is this from the summits of the world, whether on heights or on plains ! Light and sound

seem to be set free by the mere resounding thought of so much fruition. But, for their all-intelligible beauty, these crowns of things were long tossed together for the use of any one who so much as knew their names, and not the less cheaply because the language of description grew to be more subtle, more expert, and more poetic. Soon that expert quality also became, as it were, the waste and refuse of literature.

Waterfalls, then, have been too much in use. Not only by the travelling party of the Thrales have they been proposed too pressingly to admiration. They cannot be restored at second hand to their dignity. A very great man might restore them to his readers by a word, but no one of less authority than his need begin to take the trouble to look for it. The right course is to see them where they are, and to let the literature of the matter rest. Any phrase written here in praise of waterfalls—if such should escape—is not intended to do more than point the way whither the traveller may trudge if he will. Norway and the Pyrenees keep for us the surprise of perpetually new waters drawing to the ancient fall.

The Alps, even, have many a slender stream, perhaps bearing no name, and certainly known by no names out of sight of their nearest peaks, that are remembered in their solitude, or at least recognized at each return of the traveller, where they drop, hushed by their distance as much as by the noisy

train. There is one, for instance, seen for but a moment, that has so long a fall as to grow weak and to swing in all the light winds. The strong stem of the cascade springs from the bed of its upland stream; and as from a strong stem a sapling wavers upwards, entangled at last in all breezes, so the dropping brook wavers downwards to its last and lighter motion.

Waterfalls that are turned to torrents have not been so much the subject of the landscape of convention. Their wildness did not so take the general fancy when conventions were made; but they are the vitality of the mountains. Theirs is an expression of movement so great that all the Alpine region seems to manifest its life only by these noisy valleys. All communications, all signals and messages of the range, hasten in and out by these brilliant cataracts, one in the depth of every ravine.

They are not only the traffic and the mission of their mountains, the coursing of that cold blood and the pulse of the rock, but they carry the mountain spirit far out. There is no country under mountains but has its quietness awakened by wilder rivers than other lands are watered by. When the range is out of sight, the torrents are still hasty, cataract below cataract, shallow and clear, quick from the impulse of waterfalls. No loitering rivers in earthy beds keep level banks in those plains that have their horizon lifted by the line of great mountains; no silent rivers.

If the torrent runs dry, there is no one to be vexed by the silence. Dr. Johnson would not, perhaps, be asked to trudge for the sake of the rough charms of a mere torrent; but even if the disposition of wood and water comprised a torrent, he would have no revenge for his literary weariness in seeing his guide abashed. For a dry torrent is a most beautiful wreck, the ruin of a splendid progress and procession, of which the leader, when he went by, did not pass unknown. Such are the wide watercourses of the valleys in the Canton de Vaud, the colour of their innumerable stones a bright daylight grey, and the threads of water of their time of drought rippling just audibly by night.

Not all waterfalls make the conspicuous show of the cascades that take their leap from the rocks. In early autumn there is nothing fresher or sweeter than the minute, perpetual waterfall that hides in moss and undergrowth, and slips everywhere from the Alps. The air is nowhere silent, and hardly a blade of grass is unstirred by the delicate thrill of water. Without paths it drops minutely and invisibly into the lakes, the gentlest of all the signs of the barren and lofty snow.

## A TOMB IN BAYSWATER

Not many Londoners, it seems, know where amongst them Sterne was buried ; but his tomb stands where it did, duly tended, so that the superscription is clean and clear, within perpetual sound of the voices, of the feet, of the hootings, and of the wheels on the long westward road that starts for Oxford from Tyburn Gate. Perhaps the story told by the surgeon who thought he recognized a dead man anonymous upon a dissecting table, at the time of Sterne's death in Bond-street, has discouraged the national and the local interest in an accessible London grave of the great. Yet it matters little whether the dust beneath this grey, Georgian, braggart, vain, heavy, and ungenerous headstone be now mingled with the dust that was the body of Sterne ; or at least it is a question that touches no more than the fancy.

The lapse of time might be important in our thoughts on Sterne's tomb if we measured by the long years of childhood ; but we do not, because it is the short mature years that are historical. Added together the adult two centuries since Sterne was born are brief enough. Never did garden, court, or house, remembered with the large remembrance of ancient and spacious infancy, so shrink before the eye of the revisiting old man as the rod of ten years dwindles in his grasp.

Time is all depreciated, disproved. No device, such as Thoreau's for reducing the past to its real brevity, is necessary. He had spoken to one old woman and had wondered at the date whereto her birth referred him, but bethought himself how few of such lives as hers outstride all history and the very life of the race. But to join long life to long life is to pass in fancy by so many consecutive childhoods, for then the time will seem not short but immeasurably long. The childish years prolong time; the adult years, a man's middle years, the short years of life, make Time's changes, doing Time's work.

A mere score of such decades take us back through Wordsworth and Keats, the great English painters, the French Revolution, almost to the day when Sterne was born. What a trifle!

A score of our little adult decades have passed since the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, planned by Pope, Arbuthnot, and Swift, were a fit and actual satire upon science; since a medical pedant—learned, not a simpleton—was to be rallied for relying upon dreams and certain prescriptions of Galen, for example. (And of that best of satires since Cervantes, this Sterne, by the way, was the copyist.) It is the effect of the twenty poor decades that so fills and stuffs the narrow range of time. To unpack these years is somewhat like the unloading of a ripe bulrush, or of some other lately-closed house of seeds in autumn, whereof the wings were

bound until they opened with a spring, never to close again ; and the air is filled with the released burden of the slender rod.

Not because of the flight of time, then, is this solitude of brilliant sky, broad grass, and trees tossed by the summer wind, a place of interest ; nor for the love of Sterne, who ought not to be too easily forgiven. Henry Morley gave us a *Tristram Shandy* purged (or *à peu près*), but the stealthy offence is so constant in Sterne's intention that something like his own ignoble agility might be necessary for one who would at every point evade it. Morley suppressed one page in ten or so (apt action, as he avers, so to take tithes from the clergy), and he seems to have done the work as well as an honest man ought to hope to be able to do it. Of that no honest man can be precisely apprised—it would need a Sterne. All I mean to say is that for those who intend to read *Tristram Shandy*, or to read it again, Henry Morley's (in the Universal Library Series) is an edition to be welcomed ; to lose one page in ten is to lose nothing essential to the masterpiece.

What moves curiosity here is the question why this bullying headstone should have been erected at the will of two anonymous ' Brother Masons ', inconsequently so called in their own inscription, inasmuch as Sterne was not of their craft. Here are the couplets, turned with the metrical ability of that day, and making slovenly thinking to move

with precision. After announcing that in that place 'lyes the body of the Reverend Laurence Sterne, A.M.'—'Ah ! molliter ossa quiescant !'—the lines run thus :

If a sound head, warm heart, and breast humane,  
Unsully'd worth, and soul without a stain ;  
If mental powers could ever justly claim  
The well-won tribute of immortal fame ;  
Sterne was the man who with gigantic stride  
Mow'd down luxuriant follies far and wide.  
Yet what though keenest knowledge of mankind,  
Unseal'd to him the springs that move the mind ;  
What did it boot him ? Ridicul'd, abus'd,  
By fools insulted and by prudes accus'd.  
In his, mild reader, view thy future fate :  
Like him, despise what 'twere a sin to hate.

The confusion of images and of purposes in this composition needs no exposing. Its coherence is nevertheless invested with that virtue of propriety which the age of the couplet possessed, to the extraordinary gain of all its secondary literature, and of the less than secondary. Dignity is too lofty a name for a quality so inessential ; but it must be owned that two Brother Masons, owners of reasoning powers of the same order, and so angry as these two seem to have been, would to-day, or in any other day than that, have turned their verse with less self-possession and balance. Grim and weak, with a single flourish that never delighted any human eye, classical and paltry at oncè, is the characteristic funeral stone that bears the lines.



Modern philanthropy—perhaps that of the mild reader himself so inconsequently threatened in the verse—has changed the old burial-ground into a place of recreation absolutely unnecessary in a road that has Hyde Park on the other side of its railings. The mild reader has levelled the grass and cleared all the tombstones—Sterne's and one or two more excepted—from the wide square, ranging them against the four walls, two deep. The names will be but a little the later forgotten. One poor little name, because of the primness of the title, remains in the mind—that of 'Miss Susannah Headlam, who departed this life March the 6th, 1819, aged three years'.

No one comes to the superfluous pleasure-ground. Under the beautiful plane-trees flocks of sparrows alight with the leaves of a crisp, dry London autumn having a sun of summer, and the cats look at them, knowing there is no cover to spring from. Cover or no cover, on the impulse, a happy dog would hunt these flocks at random; the cat contains the passion of his wish as he strolls. He makes no crouch or spring, except, now and then, upon some minute moth which he afterwards eats with much ado and working of the jaws.

At the entrance stands the Chapel of Rest with the frescoes offered by Shields to the meditation of whomsoever will pause to take advantage of the quiet hour; and hither, in fact, come a very few Londoners, out of the noise.

## A CORRUPT FOLLOWING

DURING the whole nineteenth century our language underwent a certain derogation, notorious, different in kind from the corruptions of all other ages, and as familiar as brick and slate, gas, and the architecture of stations—and apparently of yesterday, and to-day, and of a morrow seen in rather dull and discouraging prospect. But the truth is that this common speech is due to the enormous influence of a great author who was born in 1737, was for forty-seven years the contemporary of Dr. Johnson, and died well within the eighteenth century.

Whose, for instance, is the use of 'I expect' for a conjecture referring to the past? It is Gibbon's: 'I should expect that the eunuchs were not expelled from the palace.' What is the 'and which', 'and who' of the slovenly? and what the 'whose' applied to inanimate things by authors too fine and too modern to write 'whereof'? Gear of Gibbon's style, both: 'Below the citadel stood a palace of gold, decorated with precious stones, and whose value might be esteemed,' &c.; and 'A Menapian of the meanest origin, but who had long signalized his skill as a pilot'. There is, it is true, the inanimate 'whose' of a more illustrious and older author, but that claims the excuse of metre.

Whence have we that peculiarly harsh vulgarism, 'so much per month', instead of 'so much a month', or 'per menscm'? From Gibbon. 'And coal will be by the sack or per the scuttle,' said a seaside landlady, in some one's observant ear. In her innocent she would not have said it but for Gibbon. And whose is the confusion of speech that cannot give the word 'same' its proper completion, but saddles it with a relative pronoun? Gibbon's: 'The Western countries were civilized by the same hands which subdued them.' 'The hands which subdued them' would be correct, and certainly more majestic.

Gibbon set the example of this common lax grammar: 'Instead of receiving with manly resolution the inevitable stroke, his unavailing cries and entreaties disgraced the last moments of his life'; and 'The election of Carus was decided without expecting the approval of the Senate'; and 'A peasant and a soldier, his nerves yielded not easily to the impressions of sympathy'. And there is nothing that (Gibbon always says 'which') illiterate politeness is so fond of as this unconstructed and decorated phrase. Gibbon's literature was scholarly, and these errors of his alter little or nothing of the honour due to his eminent elegance of style. But it was these laxities that took the public taste mightily, and it was the 'corrupt following' of this apostle that set the fashion of an animated strut of style—

a strut that was animated in its day and soon grew inanimate, as the original authentic Gibbon never does. His own narrative never fails to reply to a perpetual stimulation.

But to deal with the rest of the grammatical ill-example, left to unlucky generations from the very middle of the century of propriety, and made so much our own. It is very modern to have 'either' or 'neither' followed by more than two things, and it is pure Gibbon; all the more conspicuous as Gibbon dearly loves the sound of three: 'The policy of the senate, the active emulation of the consuls, and the martial enthusiasm of the people'; 'The undertaking became more difficult, the event more doubtful, and the possession more precarious.' But the three go ill with 'either': 'either food, plunder, or glory;' 'either salt, or oil, or wood'. 'The generals were either respected by their troops, or admired for valour, or beloved for frankness and generosity.'

Finally, for a very little and silly blunder, what is more modern and current and popular than this: 'Magnus, with four thousand of his supposed accomplices, were put to death'? And even this is Gibbon.

To have done with mere grammar, there is surely no author in the history of our literature who has so imposed a new manner of writing upon an admiring people. He changed a hundred years

of English prose. The dregs of his style have encumbered the nation. Changes that have been ascribed to Johnson were his doing and not Johnson's.

He belonged to the eighteenth century ; but the nineteenth century belonged to him, because he possessed it. That is why he and his English are thus modern ; the times became conformed to him ; and he was himself not his own age, but that which succeeded and admired him.

It was to the broad face of astonishment, and with the self-conscious face of novelty, that Gibbon addressed his prose. That shortened sentence (for it was he who shortened the sentence, and Macaulay did but imitate his full stops for the pauses of historical surprise) was to strike and to demonstrate, and this with a gesture constantly renewed. 'Suspicion was equivalent to proof. Trial to condemnation.' 'The strict economy of Vespasian was the source of his magnificence. The works of Trajan bear the stamp of his genius.' His, too, is the full ceremony of the ushering phrase : 'It is easier to deplore the fate, than to describe the actual condition, of Corsica.' His, too, the 'the latter and the former', which became a favourite fashion. 'Oh, do not condemn me to the latter !' exclaims a lover in one of Mrs. Inchbald's stories, after a statement of his hopes and fears ; and this phrase of emotion was a debt to Gibbon. The reader finds that the lady

does not condemn him to the latter ; she permits some prospect of the former. 'Peruse' is Gibbon's verb, and 'extensive' a favourite adjective. To him we owe 'the mask of hypocrisy' and 'the voice of flattery'. It is not his fault that posterity divided this property so lavishly among themselves.

And yet is there no fault in his own frigid prodigality ? Take this sentence in all its splendour : 'The Tyber rolled at the foot of the seven hills of Rome, and the country of the Sabines, the Latins, and the Volsci, from that river to the frontiers of Naples, was the theatre of her infant victories.' And this : 'A distant hope, the child of a flattering prophecy.' This all-inhuman image reminds us, by contrast, of Shelley, who often has this figure of a child, and never, however remote the thought, without a sense of childhood. So cold is Gibbon that when the incessant stimulation of his rhetorical intention spurs him to describe a murder thus : 'A thousand swords were plunged at once into the bosom of the unfortunate Probus,' we are moved to tell him trivially that he exaggerates. When Burke said 'A thousand swords' he meant a thousand, and had a right to mean them, but Gibbon did not, obviously, mean a thousand.

'The unfortunate Probus' is the model of a sentence that sometimes becomes monotonous even with the carefully various Gibbon : 'The prudent Atticus' begins a phrase, and 'the equitable Nerva' passes it on to 'the cautious

Athenian', and then again to 'the generous Atticus'. His is a frigidity that deals broadly with massacre and the sack of cities. And from amid these generalities, as it were invisible unless viewed from afar, he suddenly plucks us this man's 'smile', or that man's 'blush'. Whatever Gibbon's race, there never was a writer so exceedingly Latin in spirit.

'To view', by the way, is one of his favourite verbs: 'Viewing with a smile of pity and indulgence the various errors of the vulgar . . . and sometimes condescending to act a part on the theatre of superstition, they concealed the sentiments of an atheist under the sacerdotal robes.' Readers with a sense of humour may remember under what conditions Zenobia 'reiterated the experiment'; and the fatal manner in which the tradesman's circular of to-day has 'diffused' (as Gibbon would say) the last ruins of his prose by post, is rather curiously illustrated thus: a little while ago some infamous face-wash was described in advertisements as a mixture of drugs brought across the desert by fleet dromedaries. And here is Gibbon's Zenobia 'mounting her fleetest dromedary'.

How great, nevertheless, how sombre are the nobler habits of his language: 'The veteran legions of the Rhine and the Danube.' What armics! what time! what space! what war! 'Give back my legions, Varus!' Give back our legions,

Gibbon ! We may count our regiments, but thou hast named, not counted, multitudes.

And when Gibbon 'gratifies' these legionaries, the polite word does but make them more historical: 'After suppressing a competitor who had assumed the purple at Mentz, he refused to gratify his troops with the plunder of the rebellious city.' So that we do not forgive the corrupters who so scattered the word that burlesque was necessary for sweeping it out of the way. When Mr. Micawber confesses his 'gratifying emotions of no common description', Dickens rallies a distant Gibbon.

Ruskin, student of Hooker in the further, and of Johnson in the nearer, past, was the first writer of pure prose—the first by a long tale of years—to reject the whole encumbrance of the vain spoils of Gibbon; yet even he has one little patch of them: 'A steep bank of earth that has been at all exposed to the weather contains in it . . . features capable of giving high gratification to a careful observer.' It is solitary in *Modern Painters*; it is the nether Gibbon, a waste product of Gibbon.

But now I spoke of burlesque; and Dickens's burlesque of style is admirable; there is also a burlesque of another and more innocent kind: when the author of a recent English work on the *Divine Comedy* says that Paolo and Francesca were to receive from Dante 'such alleviation as circumstances would allow', that also is a distant, a shattered Gibbon, a drift of Gibbon.



## THE SWAN OF LICHFIELD

MISS ANNA SEWARD should not be made answerable for the poetry of the late eighteenth century but that no office or responsibility could be conferred upon a more willing recipient; the honour is hardly more than she demanded from the respect of the age to come; and when she bequeathed her works to this great man for editing, her letters to that, and her name to posterity, she would have heard with the satisfaction of her conscious hopes, rather than with elation or surprise, that another century would charge her with all the accumulated opinions of 1799.

It is Mr. Lucas's witty commentary<sup>1</sup> that recalls the name of Anna Seward and her claim to speak for those days—the time between two ages. I have no intention whatever to write of her with irony. Neither has Mr. Lucas yielded to the obvious temptation. There is something worthy of no slight respect in the justified security of her representative attitude. To deride her would be to deride that age, almost the latest that had full confidence, that took its historic place absolutely, without reluctance, suffered no misgiving, and did not disturb the order and course of history.

The centuries before our own have resembled a river whereof the direction is known, for it is

<sup>1</sup> *A Swan and her Friends.*

still far from the tidal regions of its journey ; so was the course of things in 1799 ; but in another fifty years the stream of the modern age had, as it were, begun to feel the tides. Waves have set in towards the head of the waters, or they double the current of the ebb. Waters breast waters, and travel against the journey of the stream, making brief excursions foot to foot with Time. Or there is a swing that sends the river turning with the tide, outstripping the pace of the natural pilgrimage.

So was the mind of the nineteenth century lifted and cradled, in suspense like the pause of a vehement heart ; so did it tend to the past and set to the future, a tidal flux and influx that flew from the end, flowed from the goal, filled and brimmed upper reaches, revisited pastures of yesterday with eager waves, or ebbled with a run and made haste to leave them twice.

If this, then, was the tidal surge of the stream of letters and the arts, the end of the eighteenth century was almost the last date before the tides began to be perceptible. Almost—for perhaps the days when Walter Savage Landor was seriously discussing the merits of a poem by Miss Chose upon the Queen were really the last of the stream above tides. It may be that the perturbing shock first interrupted the onward flowing just after him. Smooth days, those—there were no doubts as to the way of the wave, and no need to watch the hour in order to know whether backward or

forward its course was shaped. A stream is a stately stream above the tidal influence. And in Miss Anna Seward's years the historic river of the mind was unchecked : it glided.

I think there never was a day of more orderly confidence. The ' taste ', the laws, that had come to pass were the only laws and the only taste that were timely or possible. From the later Milton to Dryden, from Dryden to Addison, Pope, Johnson, Gray, Cowper, Crabbe—the way is a way that has no turning. We mark it with some mingled feelings, but surprise is not one of them. It is much the same in the matter of town architecture. The brick box that came to pass in the building of London streets, in the course of the same age, followed the time of dignity, beauty, and fancy which was Wren's, and all the degrees thereto were in a kind of order. Doubtless, this is why we have learnt, in the fluttering centre of a renewed architectural town, to look with some degree of esteem upon the black brick box, if only it be truly of that time. And this not because it has a quiet civic majesty of approach to its door *à deux battants*, and passages and rooms proportionate within, but because that very exterior, which was the negation of architecture, was the last truly punctual style of building. And before its day they might be classical, but they were classical in a manner that was of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with an intense spirit

of the time. Perhaps the clearest sign of the times before the beating tides is this—their secure self-confidence; for they never doubted that their taste was the best and their criticism the result of accumulated judgement. Nay, in the dregs of times—in 1840—they had faith in their romances, Italian landscape, steel engraving, portraits with large eyes, in a word, in their ‘finish’ (the word is ominous); and because of their good faith we may deride even these with good humour.

Now, Miss Seward has an incontestable right to speak in the name of her contemporaries. There is hardly any one else who had all her good faith and solemnity. But first let me pause upon the title given to her with so much dullness and elegance—the Swan of Lichfield. The Swan of Avon had at least a river; he was never the Swan of Stratford-on-Avon. But with all respect to the poet who devised the name for Shakespeare, we may hold that it was not well inspired to suit a poet who sang in his middle days and was silent some time before he died. Let this, however, pass as the perversity of a phrase not without charm. It is the perversity, perhaps, that has made the name so dear and a household word. But at any rate a Swan of Avon could swim, he was not placed on a high road, or in a street, or within the precincts of a cathedral close. The Swan of Lichfield must have been named with an agreeable intention to confer a sweet dignity, and

something of that faded dignity remains. The episcopal palace was her home, and she was called a Swan when she was in full career; they did not wait for a swan-song.

So close was she to the first beginnings of the tides that she blundered when she left much of her poetry to Sir Walter Scott, not doubting his willingness to serve her as editor. He did the work, with some considerable excisions, and gave the volumes to the world, but in an 'aside' he has called her poems execrable. So that she was all too confident of the immediate future. Dying early in the nineteenth century, she continued a little too long the assurance of the eighteenth; that was her sole fault. In regard to her own day she had none.

It seems even that 'execrable' is an unjust word. Miss Seward did not attempt to describe a moonlight night without forgoing her bed to match it with a phrase. Her sincerity is not without its literary value, for it succeeds in a measure; if not fully communicated, it is suggested, and this is no small thing. Moreover, there is a poetic thought—an implicit thought, an inclusion—in her sonnet on 'December Morning':

... Then to decree  
The grateful thoughts to God, ere they unfold  
To friendship or the Muse.

This surely is not without subtlety; nor is the final line, in which the reader and student is said

to fill his days so full that though he be not old he 'outlives the old'. A poet capable of this sense of present time (for here is no mere commonplace as to future influence or literary immortality; she means that the outliving is present)—a poet who had this thought might have been a fine poet; she used her intellect, and that action is the vitality of all poetry that is not song only, but poetry and song.

This is so high a specimen that I will quote no more. Over Miss Seward's criticism it would be but too easy to make merry. 'For the magnificent,' she says of her century, 'we have Akenside, Thomson, Collins, Dr. Johnson, Mason, Gray, Chatterton, Darwin, and the sublime Joanna Baillie; in the *simpler* style, Shenstone, Beattie, Cowper, Crowe, Bowles, Burns, Bloomfield, Walter Scott and his school; Coleridge, Southey, and *their* school. Poetry can have no nobler models than these supply to her various styles.' She must have read the 'Ancient Mariner'; she names Coleridge with Southey!

She had the eighteenth-century love for something that was *not* purity of style. I think that the critics of our own day have hardly perceived the violence of an age that wrote 'taught the doubtful battle where to rage'; 'red Arbela'; 'gory horrors crowned each dreadful day'; 'the madding crowd'; 'maddened o'er the land'; and a thousand other things in tatters. Miss Seward rebuked

a writer for stealing 'gulphy' from Pope. 'Gulphy', she thought, was too good to steal. 'He stole the picturesque epithet "gulphy" from Pope':

And gulphy Xanthus foams along the field.

'Than which a more poetic line,' she decides, 'was *never* written.'

## JOANNA BAILLIE

WOULD Joanna Baillie's *Plays on the Passions* have been so shunned by later generations and then so forgotten, if the writers of Literary Histories had remembered to mention the 'Comedies on the Passions' as well as the 'Tragedies'? For every tragedy Joanna Baillie, whose plan of dramatic labours was drawn up with a singular completeness, wrote also a comedy; and one at least of these sprightlier plays is so buoyant, so busy, so apt in speech, and so pleasant, within the limits of eighteenth-century wit, that a modern manager might surely do worse than try his luck with it.

If any man should desire to possess the full intention of Joanna Baillie in her undertaking, in her dealing with the Passions, he may have it in a great many pages of most explicit introduction, with her own decisions on all such controversies as those touching the individual and the type, in tragedy. Joanna Baillie had thought out all such matters. But her few readers are, perhaps, content to take as read this treatise, with its good sense and its very small charm. "She knows well what she is about, this at any rate is certain: and when she addresses herself with a most simple sense of responsibility to the tragic presentation



of Hatred, Remorse, Jealousy, and Fear, her good faith and gravity, and the admirable manner in which she puts the murderer to school, nearly quiet the reader's natural resentment and inclination to revolt.

With average good will and a fair readerly spirit, you may take these resolute tragedies, with their enormous *parti pris*, as works of no despicable art. Joanna Baillie would by no means permit you to slight her art. She has a passage in which she disclaims the crude intention of setting up the image of a single passion as the whole nature of a man. If there were no conflict, she says, there would be no force, for the passion would have nothing to compel, to break or bend, within the passionate heart. But neither will she allow the units of humankind to puzzle us on the tragic stage with their asymmetry of nature. Her jealous man has other impulses for jealousy to grapple with, but they serve his jealousy so. She will not endure, as she tells us, eccentricity.

Add to this manner of planning an eighteenth-century blank verse of the second order, and you have the drama which seemed Shakespearian to many.

It is not too much to say that any other drama—Antiquity and Shakespeare apart—would have had grave reason to be proud of Joanna Baillie. Her plays seem to be built up and locked together soundly; they close with a conventional but not

obtrusive dignity. Knowing the Passion that has been the theme, you are apt to turn to the final speech over the hero's long-vexed body, the comment that proclaims an impartial sentence in tragic peace, and you find no weaknesses; the silence follows upon no manifest failure. Vivacity among the smaller characters, and some of the strength of the ages (being the strength of tradition) in the greater, leave her tragedies in no mean place; leave them there too literally, for few are the readers to put them to any test or question. In their day they and the 'metaphysical preface', as Mrs. Thrale calls it, were the occasion of some sayings hard to our ears. 'A masculine performance' is the expected opinion, duly expressed, but we are not so well prepared for Sir Walter Scott's reply to Lockhart: 'If you wish to speak of a real poet, Joanna Baillie is now the highest genius of our country.'

It is the comedy following the tragedy of 'Basil' that takes my fancy. Love seems to be the passion in hand, and Joanna Baillie makes such pretty eighteenth-century sport of her theme (her hero keeping the fine sensibilities, expressed with impassioned elegance, of Steele's *Conscious Lovers*) that it is not easy to realize that she passed the middle of the nineteenth century, albeit in extreme old age. Of the preceding tragedy I will say merely that one may detect in it a fancy of Antiquity, as the eighteenth century

dressed it, which is wonderfully pleasing : a little boy, Mirando, vexes the capricious heroine by naming her lovers ; he creeps into her arms and begins to trouble her free heart, making guesses for sugar-plums. The reader likes to think that by a candid allegory, fit for Sir Joshua Reynolds's painting of a gold-headed boy and a brown-eyed maid, Miss Joanna Baillie had given the name of Mirando to none other than Love himself, Cupid the bee.

But to the comedy. It is called 'The Trial', and turns upon the device, since repeated, perhaps, more than once, of shuffling a couple of heroines, so that she who is the heiress may disguise herself in the dresses of her penniless cousin, and receive impertinences, suffer neglect, and also test the true heart proffered in intention to her as a girl without wealth. It is the exceeding sweetness of the two good girls bent upon their frolic (which is also a romp) that makes the charm of this happy play. They exchange names upon the wildest impulse consistent with their Georgian manners. They are audacious and decorous ; confess their quest, which is for a 'sensible lover' ; busy themselves therein, make inquiries, hide behind screens, plot together the exposure of the fortune-hunter, acknowledge the full value of their own beauty, and this with a propriety all of its own time.

Agnes has the better wit as well as the gold,

but the lesser beauty. She it is who lays the plot, and persuades the uncle, when he would fall out with her and her cousin, to second their game. He would not, he avers, make a holiday mummerly for their pleasure, and his wig is too old for a ball. 'Nay, don't lay the fault upon the wig, good sir, for it is as youthful and as sly, and as saucy-looking as the best head of hair in the county. As for your old wig, indeed, there was so much curmudgeon-like austerity about it that young people fled before it, as, I daresay, the birds do now.' As for the unlucky 'fops'—the fops whom Joanna Baillie brings forward and overthrows in incredible effigy, after the fashion of the other satirists—Agnes, or, rather, her cousin Mariane, is troubled by many. Each one is mimicked in the dressing-room dialogues of these two enterprising rogues, and the appropriate humiliation is prepared for each with all precision. 'Such a man must be laughed at, not scorned; contempt must be his portion.' Mariane falls in: 'He shall have it then. And as for his admirer and imitator . . . any kind of bad treatment, I suppose, that happens to come into my head will be good enough for him.' This last is pretty wit. So is this gipsy's reply to her uncle's reproof in regard to her dealings with yet another: 'He would not let me have time to give a civil denial, but ran on planning settlements. . . . I could just get in my word with a flat refusal as he was about to

provide for our descendants to the third generation. . . . He is only angry that he can't take the law of me for laughing at him.'

Even when you hear of the 'gentle young man, with dark grey eyes, and a sensible countenance', and are at once aware that it is indeed *he*, this charming Agnes is hard to capture. As he walks backwards before her with a play of homage (for he too can be light) she mocks him with her dance, and dances him up the stage and out at the door. And if there were any living actress who had the eighteenth-century propriety it would be pretty to see her do it. The eighteenth-century baggages! They called their admirers by their surnames *tout court*, and their breeding was admirable.

Hardly less pleasant is the comedy on 'Hatred', in which a candidate for a parliamentary election hears good news about his detested rival: 'Art thou sure that they laughed at him? In his own inn and over his own liquor? Ha, ha! ungrateful merry varlets!'

She, who had this humour, to be called 'the highest genius in our country', and to be so taken up with 'the passions of human kind'! One of the eulogists of her tragic power calls her 'un-deviating'; yet she deviated delightfully.

## THE CLASSIC NOVELIST

JANE AUSTEN seldom begins a novel without a deliberate chapter—generally a family chapter. A masterly consciousness of her own authority gives her the right of control over her reader's impatience or slovenliness. The order of things is hers, not his, and he must wait her time for wit. Hers are what Jeremy Taylor, even at his prayers, calls 'measures of address'. Her openings imply a firmer hold upon narrative than later novelists, with their verbless first sentences, their 'he' and 'she' for persons to be named later, thought to grasp at. The moderns would be much depressed were they required to open thus: 'The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the centre of their property, where, for many generations, they had lived in so respectable a manner as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance.' We consent to read the dismal opening; we endure the pother of the unmusical words; we tolerate it all because we know that in a page or two the respectable Dashwoods will be deprived of some of the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance. We know that Miss Austen will make of her personages good sport for her reader, her sense of derision being

equal to that of her own kin, the original Philistines. For another example, would any later author, having a Mrs. Bennet to deride for our delight, consent to introduce her thus : ' Mrs. Bennet was a woman of mean understanding ' ? But in this case Miss Austen's art loses nothing, even by the chill of that presentation.

That Jane works upon very small matters is hardly worth saying, and certainly not worth complaining of. Things are not trivial merely because they are small ; but that which makes life, art, and work trivial is a triviality of relations. Mankind lives by vital relations ; and if these are mean, so is the life, so is the art that expresses them because it can express no more. With Miss Austen love, vengeance, devotion, duty, maternity, sacrifice, are infinitely trivial. There is also a constant relation of watchfulness, of prudence. As the people in her stories watch one another so does Miss Austen seem to be watching them, and her curiosity is intense indeed ; she realizes their colds—her female characters take a great many colds—so that one seems to hear her narrate the matter in a muffled voice, but not precisely because of her sympathy. That such close observation can work on without tenderness must be a proof of this author's exceeding cynicism.

Triviality of relations among Miss Austen's personages does not prevent a certain kind of intensity. Lying and spite among her women work

at close quarters. With the men we hear of a somewhat wider range; there is, in the case of one justly rejected suitor, a suspicion, a rumour of 'Sunday travelling'; the accusation is not precisely brought home.

No one who has not read *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* is able to say that he knows worldliness in its own proper home. There, 'engaging the general good opinion of surrounding acquaintance' (the mouthful of thick words!) worldliness keeps its dowdy and hopeless state and ceremony. There is, in almost every second page of Miss Austen, a detestable thing called, in the language of the day, 'consequence'. No slang of our own time, by the way, has ever misused a word more foolishly. To 'consequence', and to the heroine's love of it, is promptly sacrificed all that might have seemed the beginnings or suggestions of spirituality. There is more that is spiritual in the heroines of to-day—in the 'female animal' herself—than in Anne, in Harriet, in Jane, in Fanny, or in any other of the young women who gossip through the pages of these famous novels. The men gossip, too; they are minutely occupied with the engagements, colds, arrowroot, tea-parties, and correspondence of the women.

All this, it may be said, relates to Miss Austen's subjects and not to her perfect art. But Miss Austen's art and her matter are made for one another. Miss Austen's art is not of the highest



quality ; it is of an admirable secondary quality. Her gentle spinsterly manner prevents us from perceiving at first how much of her derision—for she is mistress of derision rather than of wit or humour—is caricature of a rather gross sort. ‘Lady Middleton resigned herself to the idea with all the philosophy of a well-bred woman, contenting herself with merely giving her husband a gentle reprimand on the subject five or six times every day.’ Far finer is Miss Austen’s success when she gains her effect by delicate persistence in reiteration. This is the way in which she enjoys Mr. Woodhouse, the old gentleman in whose eyes every woman who has had the good luck to marry out of his tedious house is a ‘poor dear’. His compassion makes excellent sport, of a kind, by the effect of cumulation. The author’s patience and vigilance are, indeed, perfect, inasmuch as they never neglect or fail to perceive an opportunity for giving the turn to his phrase, the tone to his word. And the whole thing would advance, by the slow degrees of this method, and close in a little masterpiece, but that something of the fineness, as well as something of the increase, of the result is now and then marred by Miss Austen’s own explanation. She prepares her reader deliberately ; she instructs him at the outset in what he would have become convinced of at the end.

Her irony is now and then exquisitely bitter. ‘Who could tell’—Miss Austen is presenting the

thoughts of Mrs. John Dashwood in regard to her unwelcome sisters-in-law—‘that they might not expect to go out with her a second time?’ The power of disappointing them, it was true, must always be hers. But that was not enough.’ About the following little sentence there is something of the wit of surprise. It describes the joys of a young woman of the less admirable sort, lately married: ‘They passed some months in great happiness at Dawlish; for she had many relations and old acquaintances to cut.’ Miss Austen has a word in dismissing the inconstant Mr. Willoughby: ‘His wife was not always out of humour; and in his breed of horses and dogs, and in sporting of every kind, he found no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity.’

The lack of tenderness and of spirit is manifest in Miss Austen’s indifference to children. They hardly appear in her stories except to illustrate the folly of their mothers. They are not her subjects as children; they are her subjects as spoilt children, and as children through whom a mother may receive flattery from her designing acquaintance, and may inflict annoyance on her sensible friends. The novelist even spends some of her irony upon a little girl of three. She sharpens her pen over the work. The passage is too long to quote, but the reader may refer to *Sense and Sensibility*. In this coldness or dislike Miss Austen resembles Charlotte Brontë.

Most dully expressive are Miss Austen’s country

houses. One description places her people in a few words in the scene that suits them with a quite subtle suitableness; and the thing is presented in words which, here again, by their very lack of music define mediocrity: 'Cleveland was a spacious, modern-built house, situated on a sloping lawn. The pleasure grounds were tolerably extensive; and, like every other place of the same degree of importance, it had its open shrubbery, and closer wood walk; a road of smooth gravel, winding round a plantation, led to the front.' There, there in the modern-built mansion was the goal of the hopes of heroines. To the shrubbery they betook themselves, in a 'hurry of spirits', or other limited forms of emotion that might make them wish to escape remark. In and out pottered the men—the men of the period, the men of so strange a sex. In the tolerably extensive grounds walked 'consequence', and its wheels marked the smooth gravel that wound round the plantation.

Before quitting the noble subject of 'consequence' let it be noted that Emma had the following hesitation about a youth she was inclined to admire (Emma was not twenty-one): 'Of pride, indeed, there was perhaps scarcely enough; his indifference to a confusion of rank bordered too much on inelegance of mind. He could be no judge, however, of the evil he was holding cheap.' It is an unheavenly world.

## A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

AN old book called *The Mirror of the Months*, published anonymously in 1826, seemed, at a glance, to a random reader, to contain little thin springs of thoughts that walked the world in volume and dignity fifty years later. There was nothing else to hint that the book was the work of the father of a poet, but the father of one among all poets was manifestly the author. Soon after, the same reader found it attributed, in a bookseller's catalogue, to P. G. Patmore.

The earliest or the directest spring is called the source of a river; but we know not how far apart and on what scattered watersheds rose the tributary waters, early and late, that filled a splendid summoning and gathering stream, and charged it with rains of the four courts of heaven. It need not dismay us to find the one discoverable source to be something so slight as—for example—a passage on the month of February in *The Mirror of the Months* (it is hardly worth quoting) whereof the ode on 'St. Valentine's Day' of Coventry Patmore was the ultimate fulfilment. Yet a reader may be reluctant to find a small thought, lying cold in a minor mind, to be the certain beginning of a great thought in an illustrious mind; the perfectly recognizable yet insignificant origin of what we love is more sur-

prising than would be a stranger beginning. Perhaps we feel this unwelcome surprise because we had been too ready to believe that what is original is strong, and what is original is warm. It was easier to think of a first impulse tiring or becoming more composed, of a passion gradually losing light and flame, than of this increase, kindling, and quickening. It is because the small source of 'St. Valentine's Day' is really authentic that its inadequacy does little less than startle us. At any rate the incident is one that may instruct us in the history of that second step which is momentous in intellectual things.

Furthermore, the ambiguous questions of heredity seem thereby to gain in mystery; and some things must needs gain in mystery before we can at all undertake to think upon them. Without mystery they are all obscure. Who can think, for instance, of the infinity of space without adding inconceivable things to his meditation? And, in like manner, the bond of fathers and sons seems to become somewhat more intelligible if we add to the comparatively easy thought of the responsibility of a father for the mind of a child some confession of the retrospective answer to be exacted from the child, inasmuch as in the child is the fulfilment of what was but prophesied in the father, whom the son at last justifies.

In 1826 Leigh Hunt must have dominated unduly. *The Mirror of the Months* would evidently have been

graver, fresher, and more frank, in thought and in English alike, but for the example of the excessive amiability that makes Leigh Hunt's poem of *Rimini*, among others, ridiculous. It was a mere fashion, apparently, and it is not difficult to imagine that even Leigh Hunt could talk with a better simplicity than the simplicity of the universal literary smile he practised in his books. There is something that does but ape the humane, the liberal, the gracious. It is an early nineteenth-century attempt at the favour and prettiness of the Elizabethans, with an absolute rejection of the Elizabethan 'horrors'.

Yet without 'horrors', without a real murder among the dances, without royal madness embowered, and noble distraction wearing flowers, without the wild convention, without the noble spirit, wilder than nature—a barbaric artifice outfacing nature—what were the Elizabethan favour and prettiness worth? Nay, they would never have been there but to adorn frightful deeds. The men of a hundred years ago took one part and left the other, and were delighted in the civilized choice they had the grace—as they held it—to make, in a tolerant rebuke, in a liberal approval, of the great past. And see the fruit of that choice. Not being fond of Leigh Hunt, I had not read *Rimini* until a year or two ago, and now already the most conspicuous memory I have of the story of that poem is the memory of an incidental picnic.

It is possible, of course, that my angry fancy may have exaggerated the cause of its own derision—and that the event sung in the canto in question may have been some modification of a picnic; as it were a mitigated picnic; I have not the poem for reference. Nevertheless, there stands a picnic of some sort—a contribution of the English man of letters to the story of the Adriatic cities and of the antecedents of Dante's Hell.

A picnic, I maintain it, a drive, a cloth under the trees, are there. I am quite certain, at any rate, that the place chosen therefor is called by Leigh Hunt, in so many words, 'a rural spot'.

A far greater man than Leigh Hunt—nay, there is no common measure of comparison—has, by some ill luck, at nearly the same moment of our literary history, also made the same Francesca da Rimini the subject of some entirely nineteenth-century feeling. I speak of Walter Savage Landor, and of the exquisite passage of the *Imaginary Conversations* (the *Pentameron*). What he does he does, unlike Leigh Hunt, with genius; but—one must have the courage to say so—in error as complete as the little writer's. The reader may be reminded of that tender page about Francesca: 'She stops: she would avert the eyes of Dante from her: he looks for the sequel: she thinks he looks severely: she says, "Galeotto is the name of the book," fancying by this timorous little flight she has drawn him far enough from the nest

of her young loves. No, the eagle beak of Dante and his piercing eyes are yet over her. "Galeotto is the name of the book." "What matters that?" "And of the writer." "Or that either?" At last she disarms him; but how? "*That* day we read no more." Such a depth of intuitive judgement, such a delicacy of perception, exists not in any other work of human genius.' And this judgement, for greater misfortune, he puts into the mouth of Boccaccio, because he loved him, and intended that he should speak from Landor's heart; and so, indeed, he does. But the day of Boccaccio was not ours, and there is no possible exchange of hearts. Are we candid if we persuade ourselves to find these pauses in the speech of Francesca? I protest that I read the line in one cold breath of almost indifferent anger. 'The name of the book', as Landor has it, is not in Dante at all. 'A pander was that book, and the writer thereof,' is simply what the Francesca of Dante says.<sup>1</sup>

To come back to *The Mirror of the Months*. This is a volume so full of charm that it is something less

<sup>1</sup> Francesca calls the book a Galeotto and him who wrote it a Galeotto, because 'Galeotto' was then the synonym for 'pander'. Galeotto (Gallehault) was he who brought Lanciotto and Ginevra to their first sin, according to the *Tavola Rotonda*, a romance popular in Francesca's time. Dante had none of the pretty and complex meanings imputed to him by Landor. Dante, the insistent moralist, simply intended a simple warning against dangerous reading: he was in this obedient to a Bull (in 1313) whereby the Pope condemned *La Tavola Rotonda*—one of the earliest books to be thus banned.



than just to reproach it so hastily with Leigh Hunt's universal literary smile. Something of that it has, indeed, but it has also the smile of spirit and that of sweetness. Of two wits of yesterday two phrases, for example, are familiar in admiring quotation : ' The age of indiscretion ', and ' Yes, nature is creeping up ', or, in another form, ' Not like his portrait? He *will* be like it.' Every one recognizes the phrases so well that there is perhaps not a reader in England who needs to be more than reminded of them. Now ' the age of indiscretion ' is in *The Mirror of the Months*, where it got no fame, or little; and ' Nature is creeping up ' is fairly anticipated in the passage : ' Cattle wade into the shallow pools of warm water, and stand half the day there stock still, in exact imitation of Cuyp's pictures.' Take this description of the parent birds' business of bringing out their young broods and dismissing them, ' while they (the parents) proceed in their periodical duty of providing new flocks of the same kind of " fugitive pieces ", as regularly as the editors of a magazine.' And this for a mere laugh : ' The only specific reason why I object to March is that she drives hares mad ; which is a great fault.'

Moreover, the procession and recession of the year is here noted in the garden and in the open field of England by senses full of spirit. The separate and atmospheric effect of an oat-field among all other grain is well expressed in the phrase where the oats are said to hang ' like raindrops in the air '. And

the author has eyes for the scarcely perceptible and most slender growth that in July pricks through the short and level turf and makes the grassy downs live in the winds, as poplars make the woods. 'April', says this forgotten writer, 'is worth two Mays, because it tells of May'—a subtlety somewhat like that of his son's minor fancies.

And finally another small spring of the poetry to come in the following generation is in the mere phrase 'The pomp of health and the lustre of loveliness'. Coventry Patmore, with the poet's finer verbal art, had afterwards

So much simplicity of mind  
In such a pomp of loveliness.

## THOMAS LOVELL BEDDOES

THERE are some writers whom the judicious reader forgets by name, with the express intention of clearing them away. For oblivion is not always a slovenly thing. It is sometimes directed with no slight care, and has regard to all the distinctive characteristics of the one to be forgotten, effacing him with every possible precision, good aim, and attention. Others, again, it is more convenient to forget in little companies, according to their 'school'; and there is no great precision necessary for picking them off. You shoot, as it were, 'into the brown', for they go close-ranked.

Of Beddoes it must be said that if he is to be virtually forgotten—and there is hardly a doubt as to that—the act has to be a single and separate one. And yet this measure of distinction is not quite fairly come by. He gains it chiefly because he wrote Elizabethan tragedy in the early nineteenth century, and so gained a kind of isolation. But inasmuch as he wrote couplets to be like Keats, and lyrics to be like Shelley, he might disappear with a batch, and need give no trouble. He was not without talent, and he should have our cordial pity for living in a time when the inspiration of English poetry was withdrawn. When—for a far longer period—this had befallen before,

there had been no one living aware of the lapse. When Shelley and Keats were gone, Wordsworth and Coleridge at an end, Beddoes was aware of what had happened, and knew all the conditions in which his own life had come to pass. He may remind you of a poor rabbit that came to consciousness in the midst of a physiological experiment. Generally the anaesthetic lasts as long as the trouble. But Beddoes had the distress of being an Englishman during a pause of poetry that must have seemed a final loss to his solitary consciousness. We know the shortness of the time, but if the struggle of his dismay was violent, and if he caught at the past—the immediate past and the distant—with a frantic gesture, shall we deride him who did not know the future that is now our past? The gap hardly shows in our view of the mountain range of poets.

If Beddoes thought that he was called upon to live a citizen of an England with no present literature, it is not wonderful that he should have been a desperate man. It was desperate to be so unwilling to confess that Keats would write no more couplets as to make this after Keats was dead :

And none went near ; none in his sweep would  
venture,

For you might feel that he was but the centre  
Of an inspired round, &c.

It is not, perhaps, quite Keats's rhyme ; but the helpless leaning on the rhyme, the unbraced

couplings, the slipping, the giving way of those two poor props of lines ill-built, are all proper to *Endymion*. So are the same things in this couplet, where the character of the words chosen for rhyming is also, almost subtly, a piece of Keats :

Thou know'st it not ; it is a fearful coop—  
Dark, cold, and horrible—a blinded loop  
In Pluto's, &c.

Here, again, is a passage so full of all the errors of this deplorable way of couplet writing that it shall be put upon record here as a final warning before it is finally forgotten. The passage begins in the course of a line (and therefore after another wretched couplet has fallen down just above), and the phrase, quite unable to stop itself, needs two and a half more couplets to come before it is precipitated, and reaches a stable equilibrium by coming to the bottom :

There sits,  
Or stands, or lounges, or perhaps on bits  
Of this rag's daughter, paper, &c.

Beddoes studied Elizabethan blank verse, and achieved no small measure of imitation, if hardly the astonishing success of these unheroic couplets. In *The Bride's Tragedy* he imitates more than the versification. The large passions, removed from the conditions of human life and yet closing in that human accident—madness—the playing with flowers and prettiness in the horrors of

a murder, the curiously aloof appeal to the intimate replies of pity and terror; the state, the royalty; the barbaric convention, the savage and noble unnaturalness, where naturalness would seem to be the looked-for motive, justification, crown, and end—for the sake of these Elizabethan characters Beddoes wrote his tragedy, and, but for a wavering into sentimentalism (less than any of his contemporaries would have shown, no doubt), he would have made something wonderfully like his model. But sentimentalism was generally a vice of his time from which Beddoes was strangely free. It is in his imitation of that inimitable favour and prettiness, and in the kind of aristocratic madness of a song, that the mistake comes to pass—the mistake of this overwrought decoration for the sentiment that is so near and yet so unlike to it. When Hesperus, who has murdered his bride and is to die, lies down before his distraught father and covers himself with the loose earth, he undoubtedly does an Elizabethan action. And when his father, dying of grief, lies down beside him, that too is Elizabethan, more Elizabethan still than the other. But when Hesperus says :

But I shall die the better for this meeting,

then, it seems to me, the feeling is modern; and so it is elsewhere. Then it seems inconsistent to reproach Beddoes because he is not modern

enough, and writes of dragons and not of men. But yet, who has not acknowledged the effect of Rossetti's phrase, 'lidless eyes in hell'? That human eyes should ever be lidless—that is Rossetti's frightful thought. Beddoes also has 'lidless eyes', but he gives them to a dragon, and it matters less than nothing that a dragon should have lidless eyes. Coleridge, by the way, had 'her lidless dragon eyes'.

Neither passion nor sweetness is frequent with Beddoes, but once or twice in the course of many lyrics on the subject of death he apprehends Shelley's thought of death, and sometimes there is a Shelley-shyness, an escape in the moment of capture, or an alien nestling and murmuring, close and strange :

What hast caught, then ? What hast caught ?  
Nothing but a poet's thought !

There is something more than his customary fancy in his phrase for love, 'Bee of hearts'; and in the almost tender song, *Dream-Pedlary* :

If there were dreams to sell,  
What would you buy ?  
Some cost a passing bell,  
Some a light sigh.

This, too, of a sad romantic story :

Like a ruffled nightingale  
Balanced upon dewy wings,  
Through the palace weeps the tale,  
Leaving tears where'er she sings.

This is a strong image in a fragment, *Concealed Joy*:

Just now a beam of joy hung on his eyelash ;  
But as I looked it sank into his eye,  
Like a bruised worm writhing its form of rings  
Into a darkening hole.

The poetry of madness is, needless to say, one of the peculiar choruses of English literature. To the centuries of wild conventions, of distracted majesties, of artifice outfacing nature and astonishing the untamed heart, to the greatness and the liberty of the English fancy, the world owes those musical light discords, from the song of Tom o' Bedlam, quoted by Isaac D'Israeli, to the mad song by Aubrey de Vere, and the stanzas added to the first-named by Francis Thompson ; for he seems to be the latest of a long line of English poets to make music for the distracted. Beddoes addresses himself to the kind of resolute pathos that set all these singers to singing. For the pathos was most resolute ; however sweetly it sounded at the full, it had cold origins. Imagination and simplicity, not passion, made all its virtue. I cannot think that Beddoes in *Emily's Complaint* has fancy or simplicity fine enough for the addition of this song to the heart-broken, heart-released lyrics of Ophelia and her sisters.

Beddoes' lyrics of death are rather German than magical—I feel these adjectives to be somewhat antithetical in this connexion ; and they call him



‘grim’. But he lacked humour. His reference to a place—

That ’s not genteel to tell,  
Where demonesses go to church,  
is the best thing I can find in that temper.

## GEORGE DARLEY

It was Beddoes who gave this half-forgotten poet, his contemporary, the name of violence. Being conscious of the brief and unimportant pause of poetic inspiration during which they lived, Beddoes wrote a letter of dismay wondering whether it were to the sentimental L.E.L. or to the violent George Darley that the trust of English poetry should be committed. It was, as we now confess with peace of mind, to neither; and there is a lesson to be learned from the desperate question—to the effect that all is not lost because an interregnum befalls and the crown of poetry is visibly put by. Beddoes was in distress for his twenty years or so. The twenty years close up in the natural perspective, and the utterance of that anxiety sounds futile and uneasy, breaking in upon sounds of more moment.

George Darley's violence, such as it was, had its way principally in a choice of words intended to retrieve the language from the Teutonism that began its fashion before he died in the middle of the century. He apparently did not hold the English language to be finally closed in, and in this he agreed with other and greater men who have used all their strength, at times with a single

hand, to hold that door open. But perhaps Darley was not always careful enough of the difference between scholarly Latinisms and those whereof a poet in his haste might not stop to test the doubtful scholarship.

Apart, however, from the Latinisms, which are not many, there is with Darley a certain delight in quaintness which makes of Teutonic words a disagreeable kind of slang. 'Streamy vales', for example, is not a welcome phrase. Like to this is the prank of writing 'bittern ooze'. The ambiguity makes the words even grotesque; for the poet is writing of a marsh; is he then making the word 'bitter' more 'quaint', or is he taking the name of a bird for an adjective? Either way he is trifling. But as George Darley died a disappointed man, and as his poetry had light and space in it, and there was lacking the perception of these in his readers at the time, it is rather his beauties than his faults that shall be dealt with here. Life, light, and distance—in poetry—seem to leave on the mind's eye the impression of red, yellow, and blue, radiant less or more according as the life is less or more impassioned, the light celestial, and the space remote; though no red, not even red veiled by the blond and tender colours of humanity, shines in Darley's verse, there is assuredly no dimness in his gold nor dullness in his azure. At the first page of *Nepenthe* the reader takes a larger and more liberal

view of the world of the poet before him, reading this line on the daytime sun

High on his unpavilioned throne.

It is followed, unfortunately, by some common-places, but in itself it is fine. Less beautiful, but also a felicity for the visionary eye, is the phrase, 'that huge-meadowed plain'. It is, at any rate, a word to sigh for in the narrow town and the narrow winter.

George Darley wrote of fairies—a dull subject, let us confess at last; and more than half of his drama of *Sylvia, the May-Queen*, is acted by fairies and fiends at war. But there are some happy fancies even in the prattle of fairy-queens to their courtiers, as where Morgana rallies her tender follower:

I've seen thee stand  
Drowning amid the fields to save a daisy.

And again:

Thou once didst cherish  
In thy fond breast a snowdrop dead with cold.

Darley was as resolute an Elizabethan as Beddoes, but while Beddoes darkened his skies for the drama of passions graced with trivial flowers blooming in an angry light, Darley addressed himself rather to the imitation of the humour and the prettiness. He copied the Shakespeare of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and though the critics say that his rustics are

tedious, it seems to me an unjust judgement. Granted the delight that Shakespeare finds in the derision of clowns as they blunder with words too long for their fortunes, and it is not fair to say that Darley is really a bore. His Andrea in the *May-Queen* makes no bad sport of that kind. Darley has the situation and the quality of the laughter from Shakespeare, but the phrase is of his own exceeding ingenuity; and when the transformed serving-man meets that dapper elf Nephon, there is some very fair success in the frolicking. 'Where is this mighty small-spoken gentleman?' asks Andrea (unluckily Darley did not know that the penultimate of this Italian name is long). 'Hillo, Signor Nobody; at what point of the compass must I look, to be mannerly?' The most charming thing in the play is this exquisite beginning of the song of a fairy who has lost the mortal lady in her care:

Where can my young beauty be  
That I have not found her?  
Out alas! this is not she,  
With a shroud around her?

This is beautiful and ancient versification and rhythm. But Darley had never got free from the habit of anapaestic vulgarities, out of date with all he wrote; and immediately after that delicate verse he begins again to caper:

For the pride of the valley, the flower of the glen,  
and so forth.

Among the phrases that give a flash to the verse is one, of graver value, that seems to recall something of Coventry Patmore's 'bright anger'. And Darley takes a flight about the world, in his happy mood and his foreboding, and there are rich lines in his landscape, such as these :

And mine ear rung with ocean's roar,  
And mine eye glistened with its blue.

With how much perception, how pliant a turn of thought, how instant a reflection, how delicate a sense of mood and habit Darley could play the seventeenth-century poet is proved by his famous lyric, *It is not beauty I demand*, with this among its stanzas :

Tell me not of your starry eyes,  
Your lips that seem on roses fed,  
Your breasts where Cupid tumbling lies,  
Nor sleeps for kissing of his bed.

In the first edition of the *Golden Treasury* this poem, of then unknown authorship, was placed, carefully timed, between Wotton and Carew. It seems to have been withdrawn altogether when its writer was found to be of the nineteenth century.

## SYDNEY DOBELL

It would be better to be purely forgotten, and then rediscovered (or not, as may befall) than to be half remembered, or remembered by rumour, as Sydney Dobell seems to have been for many years, and compromised by the praises that send a straightforward reader shying and swerving to left or right—anywhere out of the way of their finger-posts. Oblivion is clean, but not so the encumbered remembrance, and not so the reputation taken into custody and care by the Introductory Memoir.

There is a small accessible volume of selections from Sydney Dobell's poems, of which the biographical and critical introduction is more than usually disheartening. It is apparently by several hands, and one of them has the most uncertain hold upon grammatical collocation, while others seem to express in the thick English of a certain period the portly zeal of the writers for a poet who had associations with their own youth. It is, of course, easy not to read an introductory memoir; and this one should not be read by those who might charge the poet with the insignificant sincerity (equal in literature to insincerity) of the honest critics who admired him. There must

have been better things written in his praise than these. We know, for instance, Rossetti's admiration (carelessly and thinly alluded to in his rather vacant letters to Allingham) for *Keith of Ravelston*; and the poets who were Dobell's contemporaries must surely have had something better to offer him than the dull enthusiasm of biographical introductions. He was a lyrical poets' lyrical poet, in this sense: the thought, the motive, the thing for which his best lyric lives, is not only a poetic thought, it is also a brief one. It closes, it is finished in shape, it holds well within the verse. There are, needless to say, long thoughts and short thoughts, which are fit for poetry, reconciled from the beginning with the poetic intellect, and justified by themselves. It is the brief thought that is so essentially lyrical. Take, as an example, the conception of which was born the poem called *Isabel*. She who is dead was, in love, in piety, in grief, too shy for life, more spiritual, more wild, and more warm than the world, losing her in her own light, and not so much as knowing her for a secret creature, had ever seen her to be. Therefore her poet chooses no time but the dark summer dawn and the summer sunrise for his songs and for his memories. Her path had missed men's footsteps, and he travels into the hours that also are aloof, to think of her with the thoughts of the imagination. I have thus reluctantly disarrayed the phrases of



the poem in order that the reader may have the short thought at a glance.

All fine sonnets and other poems in brief final forms have in like manner brief thoughts—large, great, but short. A short thought which is poetic is the highest inspiration of the lyric poet, even though there may be many and many a splendid lyric that has it not, but is as unclosed as the passage of a bird in flight. So are the greater number of the poems of Sydney Dobell; he has not the perfect inspiration of the short thought always, or even often. That inspiration distinguishes *Isabel* greatly. Of that poetic poem let me give a stanza or two—

That early hour I meet  
The daily vigil of my life to keep,  
Because there are no other lights so sweet,  
Or shades so long and deep,  
Isabel.

And best I think of thee  
Beside the duskest shade and brightest sun,  
Whose mystic lot in life it was to be  
Outshone, outwept by none,  
Isabel.

This poem has assuredly rare sweetness and much rarer passion in its solitary tones; it has in a small measure the emotion of the hours of sleep, as the waking heart still owns it in face of the breaking of a summer dawn. The short thought is the matter and form again of those

two sonnets whereby chiefly Dobell's name is now remembered—*The Army Surgeon* and *Home in War Time*. When a poetic short thought is transfigured in a single beautiful image, then the sonnet is satisfied, the sonnet is fulfilled. It remained for the English poets so to conceive the sonnet, not re-arraying but creating it. Of these two sonnets it is *The Army Surgeon* that has this fundamental completeness; the other has not imagery, though it has, with extraordinary finality, the short thought. In both imagination is intellectual and visual, and the tide of impassioned feeling is a high tide, that has lifted all the poet's blood. These are not, perhaps, in the full sense, great poems; they have not the peace which seems, beyond all our understanding, to make an eternal quality of poetry of the tumult of Lear. They are poems of emotional unrest, but among poems of emotional unrest they are singularly fine and true, and something at least of the fusing work of passion is done upon their beautiful diction.

All in all, the whole series of war-poems have a strange success. They were written during the Crimean war, and they have all the best quality of their time, which may be called good faith. Sydney Dobell takes his types as all the Romance poets and their posterity knew them, and he does not lie in wait for the accidents and incidents of fragmentary life. He has a milkmaid in all her

symmetry, a Lady Constance in hers, a French chasseur, a wounded officer, a market wife; they are all conventional. But if the poet found his persons ready for him in a not all unwise legend, he did no small thing in filling them full of warm traditionary life. It may well be that the more modern author achieves somewhat less—or perhaps it would be better to say that he achieves his work at a less expense of life—when he makes his human creature (his unit with all the natural lack of unity) to live and to be seen by its natural singleness; when he so marks the gnarls and knots of the life, surprised in a separate man, as to give proof of a man by his very accidents. It may well be easier work to do thus than to do as Sydney Dobell does with his expected Romance, breathing so fully. The one poet shall not justly charge the other with any unhandsome or slovenly dealing.

There is, however, one poem in the war series which has another kind of life than that of the milkmaid's song. This is one of the finest—*Tommy's Dead*. Who shall say that this poem of actual knowledge, and of a life lived, is not better than the rest? More full of the poet's authentic life it may not be, but the thing is better worth doing. Tommy's father is a single and separate creature, and every line of his song is a strong surprise, though it is but of the thinness, the dullness, and the last old age in a day of bad news at the farm.

On the other hand, *The Little Girl's Song* is only in part the cry of a child ; and yet even in the least childish lines, there is the excuse that the poet, in the urgency of his feeling, has broken through the limitations of the childish speech because he could not restrain the haste of his own pity-driven word. The little girl's father is at the war, and she wonders whether indeed she sees her mother wasting with grief, or whether that face was always so pale. The trivial word of the child—' Papa '—seems to make the line more forlorn :

Do not mind my crying, Papa, I am not crying for  
pain ;  
Do not mind my shaking, Papa, I am not shaking  
with fear ;  
Though the wild wind is hideous to hear,  
And I see the snow and the rain.  
When will you come back again,  
Papa, Papa ?

The beautiful *Keith of Ravelston* is in the series of Crimean poems ; and some who know its undefined sweetness and its mystery may not be aware with how admirable an art Sydney Dobell introduces its vague outlines. It is a song sung by one who is happy in the year of sorrow—

She sings the sorrow of the air,  
Whereof her voice is made.

Then follows the strain of Romance in an immemorial cadence :

The murmur of the mourning ghost  
That keeps the shadowy kine ;  
' Oh, Keith of Ravelston,  
The sorrows of thy line ! '

I must own that *Balder* and *The Roman* have not yet persuaded me to read them through ; but the lyrics, if so chosen that a certain vein of weakness may not appear anywhere, are surely a perdurable part of our incomparable literature.

## COVENTRY PATMORE

To prophesy that the odes of Coventry Patmore shall be confessed, a hundred years hence, high classic poetry, is assuredly to promise the critics of a hundred years hence high classic quality in their judgement. It is to look for a definite intelligence and for an explicit code of literary law, inasmuch as a mind trained in the less obvious measures and restraints both of thought and of verse is needed to recognize the law of *The Unknown Eros*. It is to look, not only for such precision, but for its rare companions—liberty, flight, height, courage, a sense of space and a sense of closeness, readiness for spiritual experience, and all the gravity, all the resolution, of the lonely reader of a lonely poet. Whatever criticism may learn in time to come, *The Unknown Eros* will hardly then have many readers, and will no doubt still keep the accidental loneliness that surrounds it now by reason of the indifference of the majority; but its essential loneliness is its own quality, conferred by no world's neglect; not an effect of conspicuousness or difference; not a mere contrast, for it is relative to nothing.

The reader undertakes at least to know and to watch that solitude. It was assuredly a sense of the gravity of this enterprise that inspired the

phrase, 'lonely watcher of the skies'; a star is lonely, and its student, whatever his conditions, lonely as he watches. Pausing upon that significant phrase, we ask for a moment whose it is. Not Keats's, evidently; and it proves at last to be a word of Patmore's own; and the lonely watcher is his rapt and vigilant reader. In a now cancelled passage of Coventry Patmore's ode, *Tired Memory*, occurs the 'lonely' astronomer. Who can complain that there are not many prepared for such a vigil? Moreover, *The Unknown Eros*, although we may attempt images of sidereal distance to express its profound flight, has the more dreadful solitude of an experience, and goes far in an inverse flight, through the essentially single human heart—intimately into time and space, remotely into the heart of hearts.

Of many words of praise, the word 'classic' is chosen here because it suggests no exclusions of schools or kinds, nor even any preferences for poetry of one kind of perfection, to the slighting of poetry of another. None the less is it the most sharp and severe of all words of criticism, or it shall here have that character, if the reader will agree to understand as 'classic' all poetry that is *one*—thought and word. The fusion of thought and word is unmistakable, whether the fire of an impassioned thought bring it to pass, or the close coldness of fancy made perfect; for since we hear that metals pass into one another, *in vacuo*, by

pressure in the cold, this latter image is possible ; but even if, with Thomas à Kempis, we contemplate the metal that is one with fire and is changed into fire, it is less by the fusion of fire that a greatly classic poem is to be figured, than by a more vital union ; mind and body, where tidal thought and feeling are quick with the blood and various with the breath of life, give a juster, as well as a simpler and a human, image of a vital poem. Besides, the fire of life is made sensible to us by warmth and not by flame, and there are in literature a far greater number of humanly warm poems that are classic and vital, than of poems that are classic and vital with apparent and uncovered flame. Some of these last, indeed, there are, but few. The image of warm life is the general measure of poetry. Then is poetry proved classic and alive when a reader, struck to the heart, moved and shaken like Leontes looking on the figure of Hermione, having seen her colour, her height, her light, her age, knows her indeed, and confesses her at last by another sign : ‘ Oh, she ’s warm ! ’

In *The Unknown Eros* the poet’s intention, single, separate, strikes unique strokes against which the reader’s human heart is all unarmed by custom. It is mastery, and not violence, that so comes home, dividing soul and spirit. There is not a violence in the world that does not seem a dissipation and an essential weakness when



reproached by such a majestic energy, able to curb its hand.

Not without profoundly conscious art did Coventry Patmore achieve the ultimate, the mortal, pathos of such an ode as *Eurydice*. He was ready to tell the secret which no others could use as he used it, however it might be guessed; and the secret of *Eurydice* was: 'After exceeding ill, a little good.' The slenderness of the good and the poignancy of the ill are mingled, in this ode on dreams, with such closeness of fear as no other poet has ever endured. *Eurydice* is the dream of the mourner, who night by night follows some dreary clue through labyrinths without hope, to find the dear dead living the thin, remote, neglected life that the dead do live in these intolerable dreams. But Coventry Patmore does not always capture terror for such purposes of eternal sadness; he is able to marry terror to joy in the magnificent ode of reunion, *The Day after To-morrow*:

O, heaving sea,  
That heav'st as if for bliss of her and me,  
And separatest not dear heart from heart,  
Though each 'gainst other beats too far apart

O, weary Love, O, folded to her breast,  
Love in each moment years and years of rest.

O Life, too liberal, when to take her hand  
Is more of hope than heart can understand.

One day's controlled hope, and one again,  
And then the third, and ye shall have the rein,  
O Life, Death, Terror, Love !

*Ultima dolcessa* was once exquisitely said of the skylark ; *ultima amarella* should be the words for the lines :

Thou whom ev'n more than Heaven lov'd I have,  
And yet have not been true, even to thee ;

and the extremity of grief without bitterness, the grief that kisses and says a conscious 'farewell, farewell', is in *Departure*, and in this passage of too significant allusion, with years of tears lightly implied by a negative :

When the one darling of our widowhead,  
The nursing Grief, is dead,  
And no dews blur our eyes  
To see the peach-bloom come in evening skies.

Nor does a public sorrow utter less life and death. The ode entitled *Proem* foretells with a singular peace of grief the day when England, 'a dim heroic nation, long since dead', shall be benignly remembered no otherwise than by 'the bird-voice and the blast of her omniloquent tongue'—by the poets of her then dead language.

As to the 'natural description' for which the reader is apt to look—it might not unfairly be said that Patmore never described. He claimed the truths of science, to which in youth he had devoted his attention, to serve his poem with

images ; and thus he used them in his speech, as when the perception he gained of Divine truths by the act of contemplation and the holding his spirit still, ready, and free, was likened by him to the photographic picture of stars invisible even to the camera but made visible by a long accumulation of continuous imperceptible impressions. And nature, evasive to the mere describer, yielded imagery to him with an indescribable freshness. There is an instance in the ode, *Wind and Wave*, with its final flash of sea and sea-margins, and waves that

Traverse wildly, like delighted hands,  
The fair and fleckless sands

And burst in wind-kissed splendours on the  
deafening beach.

The smile of Psyche is

Like sunny eve in some forgotten place ;

love shows in the dark eyes of the dying woman,

As when a south wind sombres a March grove.

In *Amelia* we receive the candid, simple shock of the line in which every meeting with her beauty is likened to a first beholding of the ocean. In this ode, also, stands the 'little bright, surf-breathing town', and the westering sun fills with shade 'the dimples of our homeward hills'. Whenever Coventry Patmore touches nature it is with a sudden sight, often it is also with a sudden

insight. The blackbird at dawn, a lonely thrush at evening, singing notes few and fine, and 'sad with promise of a different sun', brought him in full the message of the wild suggestion that never left poet's heart at rest. When he wrote the *Odes*, and used thus a free metre because he knew himself to be set at liberty by his very knowledge and love of law, that heart beat in the sensitive line, and he caught rapturous breath, or sighed, as a spirit blowing whither it will.

The quality of poetry is not strained. It has not to abide our repeated question. It tests and is not tested. Every true lover of poetry knows that when he cites great lines it is not the poetry but the hearer that is to be judged. This true lover may well have outlived the desire to give to others a convincing or converting reason for his own certainties as to the most poetic things in poetry, but he still desires to know whose mind's ear is fine, and how many have the ear, as time goes on. To the treasure of these most beautiful things, to which the dramatic and the epic poets have given passages or phrases, the lyric poets stanzas or lines, it is a wonder to find how much Coventry Patmore has added. The slender volume of his odes furnishes them out of all measure. Even those readers who will not hold the author of that small volume to have answered all the conditions on which a poet is acknowledged great, will confess this extraordinary disproportion. The

mental apprehension of poetry can be put to the proof by Patmore's odes—and indeed by not a few passages of the contemned *Angel in the House*—much oftener than by honoured classical poems from which we gather those testing lines by precious threes and twos. *The Unknown Eros* yields them to us in overwhelming beauty and in strong numbers. Some have that poetry of imagery—so enkindling, so exalting that we say of imagery that it is poetry itself, until we find the poetry of the yonder side, for some again are of the simplicity, the further simplicity, that is beyond imagery. One of the testing lines of our literature has this latter character—Chaucer's, chosen by Matthew Arnold, on the lot of man :

Now with his love, now in the coldë grave.

From Coventry Patmore's odes we gather them with both hands, exalted, subdued, and greatly moved by our riches.

Why *The Unknown Eros* should have found so few readers it might be hard to say. We should have expected something different from the literary liberty and literary variety of England. Ignorance of Patmore's odes might have been looked for, that is, from readers fairly of one mind in the admiration of Byron and Scott, but it is not easily to be explained in readers of various minds admiring Byron, Scott, Wordsworth, Crashaw, Campion, Blake, Milton, and Shakespeare

the lyrist. Probably a doubt as to the whole meaning of many among the odes has discouraged even Patmore's willing readers. The beauty was there, but it was to them an uncertain magnificence, a glow from a doubtful fire, a pealing call of an uncertain word, remote as thunder, the heart-piercing utterance of an obscure grief—obscure as waters are obscure because they are profound, not because they are turbid. Some of our esteemed poets have left us meanings troubled by the lowest of difficulties—the grammatical. Their waters have matter in mechanical suspension rather than in chemical solution. It is often impossible to decide to what nouns some of the pronouns in *Sordello* refer. But Patmore's pure diction, uttered in the composure that gives high dignity to his most poignant poems, permits no such baffling of inquiry. Nevertheless some of the odes of *The Unknown Eros* are difficult. Some, we say, and are again puzzled at finding them so few. *The Day after To-morrow* is not readily understood to refer to reunion after death; the *Psyche* odes sing of a spiritual experience alien to the history, to the aspirations, and even the desires, of the greater number of deeply spiritual men; the matter of the mystical ode called *The Unknown Eros* itself is all but hidden; *Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore* darkly sings the triumph of virginity and its sacrifice at once; few or no readers will guess the *Arbor Vitae* of a very fine

ode to be the Catholic Church, and the 'nests of the hoarse bird, who talks and understands not his own word' to be (a most unjust image) the clusters of her clergy; and a few other necessities for explanation there may be. But, on the other hand, there can be no doubt, to all initiate in the world of poetry, as to the full significance—the furthest significance, to every inner alley and retreat of meaning, to every ultimate pang of sensitiveness—expressed in that terrible record of a mourner's dreams, *Eurydice*; in *Departure*; in *If I were dead*; in *Saint Valentine's Day*; or in the ode on the decline of England, already named, which contains the memorable description of her literature. Why, of these all-intelligible poems, is only one generally known, even with the relative generalness possible among the little minority that cares for poetry? That one is, needless to say, *The Toys*, a very beautiful and tender poem, but one containing less essential poetry than any other page of the odes.

It must be owned that some of the accessory persons and conditions of the story of *The Angel in the House* are unwelcome to poetry as we have learnt to hold it. But this is an avowal that we are either content, or very weakly, very ineffectually, ill content, to live in a social world that we confess to be unworthy of poetry. Coventry Patmore, as we understand his attitude, refused

to be content with such a world, and refused, moreover, to be impotently discontent. If the world was unfit for his poem, he would reject the world—and he at least knew how to reject and did not play at rejection. He did not believe that there was such unfitness, because love and immortality were there, as elsewhere, with humanity. The modern age chose to be ashamed of the manner in which it chose to live, to be associated, to prosper, to order its affairs; no other age had condescended to that kind of shame. But Coventry Patmore was not modern in this matter. He thought the daily civilized ways of a Cathedral town, granted that they were delicate and gay, and not dull, no more unfit for ‘realistic’ art than other contemporary ways, neither delicate nor gay, have been held to be before, and notably since, the writing of *The Angel in the House*. Coventry Patmore wrote of conventions in the manner of a realist, and he had for this precedents older than his critics stopped to remember. If so much of explanation is to be offered in answer to still current criticisms, how does it befall that any reader should pause upon the mere intervals in poetry so profound and penetrating as, in a hundred passages, shakes the metre with a hand of control?

Among such passages are these records of beauty:

Her eyes incredulously bright,  
And all her happy beauty blown  
Beneath the beams of my delight.



So much simplicity of mind  
In such a pomp of loveliness !  
Eyes that softly lodge the light.

And elsewhere are words that touch the heart so  
close as these :

His only Love, and she is wed !  
His fondness comes about his heart  
As milk comes when the babe is dead.

And again :

Alone, alone with sky and sea  
And her, the third simplicity.

Here is a quatrain winged, not weighted, with  
meaning :

Far round each blade of harvest bare  
Its little load of bread ;  
Each furlong of that journey fair  
With separate sweetness sped.

Again :

Blest in her place, blissful is she ;  
And I, departing, seem to be  
Like the strange waif that comes to run  
A few days flaming near the sun,  
And carries back, through boundless night,  
Its lessening memory of light.

It is possible that this early poem is condemned  
because the reader takes the 'Angel' to be the  
woman, and an angel obviously feminine is a kind  
of sentimentality. But I prefer to take the  
'Angel' to be Love. Patmore's masculine mind

probably referred the name rather to such an angel as he who in the Old Testament took up a prophet by the hair of his head and carried him across country. Together with Love, Patmore's subject was the Child in the House, before ever Pater had so varied Patmore's title. Together with the revelation of youthful love he has coupled all the sweet revelations made to a child :

This and the Child's unheeded Dream  
Was all the light of all his day.

We find that there are two master-emotions in modern poetry—in that Romance literature which has been the complementary life of Europe now for many centuries ; one dates from Dante's day, and one chiefly from the day of Henry Vaughan (Wordsworth's virtually immediate precursor). Love, and the love of Nature, mystically passionate, are what they are with us, not because all men, but because two boys, conceived them. It needs the childish dream to raise these emotions into the regions of mystery, sweetness, tenderness, and terror which they have gained because Dante was a child in love with a girl, and Vaughan a child in love with Nature. Other lovers have loved in childhood, or else they have profited by Dante's childhood ; other poets have conceived the passion for Nature in their childhood, or have profited by the childhood of Wordsworth, of Vaughan, and of Traherne. The wilder and the more real, the more

delirious and the more innocent these remote experiences, the more has the lover's love the quality of Romance, and the poet's imaginative verse the quality of the poetry of Nature. Men could never have done for mankind what these boys have done; littérature owes her two ideal adult passions to the dreams of childhood.

Coventry Patmore's ardour and mystery acknowledged that dear and ignorant origin. He did more than remember that incomparable antiquity; with him childhood hardly needed remembering, for it remained, the companion of his complete intellect, the rapture of his profoundly experienced heart, the strange and delicate witness of manly sorrows.

The most beautiful of all gardens is assuredly not that which is rather forest or field than garden, the 'landscape garden' of a false taste; nor, on the other hand, the shaven and trimmed and weeded parterre with an unstarred lawn; but rather the garden long ago strictly planned, rigidly ordered, architecturally piled, smooth and definite, but later set free, given over to time and the sun; not a wilderness, but having an enclosed wildness, a directed liberty, a designed magnificence and excess. Comparable to such a garden is Coventry Patmore's mind, obedient to an ancient law, but wildly natural under an inspiration of visiting winds and a splendid sun of genius.

No poet ever had a greater value for poetry or

attributed to it a greater dignity than the value and the dignity that consecrated it in Patmore's heart. As he very literally and actually held the members of the body to be divine, so may it be said that he saw in poetry also the incarnate word ; the metre, the diction, the pause, the rhyme, the phrase were not accidental but essential. Hence his extraordinary mastery of style. And as to his sense of the greatness of poetry as a power and domination we have but to compare it with the sense of one who spared no words in praise of poetry, and who speculated boldly as to its work and mission—Matthew Arnold.<sup>1</sup> Failing the religious sanction, failing the fundamental law with its code, poetry, Arnold thought, might take its place, whether as temporary regent or regent without a term. It would, he said, console and soothe mankind. As though a race in need of the spur and the curb, the example, the threat, and the canon, were sufficiently to be served by those unmanly ministrations ! As though to be soothed in an ill-temper and comforted in an ill-humour were the chief necessities of men, a race worthy of the dignities of chastisement ! In raising poetry to what he thought this eminence, assuredly Matthew Arnold did it no honour. Never

<sup>1</sup> He thought the value of the religions to be their 'unconscious poetry'. 'It is part of the man's unconscious poetry,' says Harold Skimpole—he is alluding to the family butcher (unpaid)—'that he always calls it "his little bill".'

was poetry more conscious than Patmore's. Nor, perhaps, if we seek among the homages of the poets to their art shall we find graver or profounder veneration than Patmore's, hardly even excepting Wordsworth's, explicit and implicit.

He valued his country chiefly for her poets. So must we learn to do, and to value her for him.

## POETRY AND CHILDHOOD

WHICH is the language of poetry? For each, perhaps, the language that first named for him a flock of sheep, a hill, a mountain river, or whatever thing touched a child's mind with a remote and yet familiar love. The poets who have for him a lifelong advantage over all others are the poets who write that tongue. No other word than theirs will be to him the very name of what he finds so fresh. Thus, for my own part, reading again the *Chants du Crépuscule*, the *Feuilles d'Automne*, *Contemplations*, and *Voix Intérieures*, I own the power of the poet who knows the true name of an orchard, and so calls it 'le verger'. 'Le verger' is purely yonder steep field of fruit-trees round and soft above their separate shadows. In another tongue the name is translated, and therefore removed by one step; it has no longer the shape and figure and spirit which the name first known has for the child learning the thing and the word in one.

Besides, Victor Hugo falls in with the mood of one who has profound childish memories connected with his common words, by writing so closely of infantine things as though to secure the charm for all a reader's lifetime to come, and to establish the authority of his French precisely

upon those names of childish import that are most subject to such an early spell.

A reader who, when he had learnt that there are birds, had learnt their English name, and had, moreover, received his father, his mother, his bed, his sleep, his nurse's song, his little breakfast, in English, has not, I think, an equal poet to rehearse for him those words, those things rather, in his later years. For there seems to be no poet in our master-poetry to do for him that singular office, and to sing the language of his first nurse to a great and authentic lyre. He may learn all nature with our poets, and he hears the Gospel first in an incomparable tongue; and his first sense of Greece doubtless comes with an adequate word. But he has no august poet to resume his ancient lullabies, heard once in ancient regions between sleeping and waking, the immemorial night-light, the homely language of antiquity and old romance as children have the sense of them in their little words at play upon the floor, at play upon the moss. He has not had Victor Hugo's French.

Furthermore still, an English reader whose childish life was uttered in French has half forgotten, amid later English, some of the daily words of that time, unused by grown men and women. These Victor Hugo sings to him. They return to him out of the past and out of his poetic page at once. They had but dropped to sleep in imperish-

able memory; they wake again, and they are more fresh to his heart than swallows, and than torrents from the Alps.

Here, then, is the tongue of poetry for him. The child and the poet know it together. They meet, they understand, they have the way of it together. And if they meet again across age and change and disuse, how close, how light, how natural is this encounter, how sudden and how old the intimacy! Poet and child have their traffic, no doubt, in every life; but what incomparable traffic is this of Victor Hugo and an English reader who had a French childhood! How ingenious is fortune to bring their communion to pass! Many are the things, small and all-important, known fully, and more than known—recognized, known after estrangement—between these two only of all the pairs of poet and child, in the world. Where else can there be just such a commerce? In the first place that poet is unique. He, too, breathes the breath of the moss closely; he has not only the child's sense of it, but also the child's inexpert and invaluable word. And the reader, on his part, has, as I have said, a peculiar experience both of memory and of oblivion. For him, then, the French language has that grace of election which makes it wholly, invincibly successful—the grace of each man's first tongue; and in overplus it has the powers of the tongue in which Victor Hugo was wont to



write of children, and, again, the powers of the tongue of a great romance. Of a word in that language, therefore, it may be said, as of the elect lady in a violent world—

Her gentle step to go or come  
Gains her more merit than a martyrdom.

The word of poetry in after-life is sublime and tragic by will, by force and conquest; the word, in the French of Hugo, has for me but to be uttered. 'Le verger' possesses not only a young child's sight of trees under the sun and moon, a young child's touch of the grass, but also the genius of the South of France, of ancient agriculture and of early song.

Assuredly those to whom the word first learnt was 'the orchard' must be content with something less than this.

A reading of later French persuades one easily that Victor Hugo was alone, and is alone, the speaker of what has become so mysterious and so intelligible, so surcharged and so buoyant a language :

Oh, 'tis not Spanish, but 'tis Heaven she speaks !  
cries Crashaw. Victor Hugo speaks not so much French as childhood, and a peculiar childhood ; Romance, and a unique Romance ; nature, too, as no eyes of Latin race had seen it until then, with insight as well as with perception—in Emerson's phrase, ' a little wildly, or with the flower of the mind '.

Apart from all this which makes the lyrics of this great poet so dear, for exclusive and accidental reasons, to one reader among many, I have no praise for the French poetic tongue. It is true that the word 'souffle' is for my ear all a summer wind at night—it has more merit than a martyrdom of description; that is by chance. It is by genius, however, that Victor Hugo makes this word so fresh and dark.

What I have to suggest is that the poets, since he ceased to write (ceased as a lyrist, not as a rhetorician), have done little more for the enlargement of their language than he did in the distant days when his work was a very revolution; and this in spite of their metrical liberty, which seems to have no bounds. The freedom he claimed from the bonds of the preceding century or so was precisely no more than his art needed. Nothing was done for the sake of liberty, for the sake of others, for the sake of pioneership, or for any other of the causes that mediocrity is fond of. All was purely for his own poetry, and because, being Victor Hugo, he could not write within the laws that held Boileau content. Where he found no need of change he obeyed Boileau or another, or La Harpe or another, with a cheerful docility that has left his verse to-day far behind the reforms of modern French prosody, 'reforms' that seem to have been inspired by the revolt of a Walt Whitman, and make easy havoc of the

whole order, the whole law. Even in the enlarged liberty made for French poetry by Victor Hugo's advance, the wave of verse met salutary bars and measures as strong as rocks. But his successors have spilt their art thinly over all boundaries, and the flat country is already under shallow water.

I have under my hand the volume of a little recent symbolist, side by side with *Les Voix Intérieures*, and the comparison persuades me that not all this new licence is able to make the French language a really liberal instrument. What has been written here must be the proof that if I have a prejudice it is for French, and that for me magic and the caprice of destiny are on that side. But there are disabilities; and it is not metrical liberty, or the chance medley of masculine and feminine endings, or the ignoring of the *e* mute, or rhymes that are but the suggestion of a jingle, or any other of these later liberties that can make this language sufficient. It lacks the second part, the other side, the splendour of alternative. It has the strangest blanks. It cannot so much as call an author shallow, nor a teacup, nor a sea.

As it has no alternative of derivation, French has none of time; no place apart for poems and prayers, but the whole language is at the disposal of the daily grocer and the trade-circular. The French of commerce, merely exaggerated, has tempted poets to make that ready eloquence resound, when the lyric could do no more, for lack of strings.

A word as to syllables—those great units of verse—and their motions. The Italian syllables dance, springing from their double consonants and long vowels; the English walk, with all variety of gait, and fly with all variety of wing; the French trot. ‘Égalisez les syllabes.’ The Frenchman who speaks right Parisian equalizes the syllables not only of his own language but of every other. Hear him speak Italian thus; hear him, as a good pastor in England, read the English Testament.

## GEORGE MEREDITH

IF the novel has been raised to the highest place in literature in our time, this was mainly by the power of one hand. Victor Hugo had not the intellect, nor Flaubert the purpose, nor George Eliot the drama, nor Thackeray the tolerance, that in union could achieve such an exaltation of an art that was once pastime. Fiction was made by Meredith for his generation the companion of poetry, and thus the second great imaginative art of letters. The picaresque novel, the novel of irony, the novel of invention, the novel of morals, the novel of emotion—the work of Le Sage, Cervantes, Balzac, Charlotte Brontë—works of genius as they are, take an intermediate, arbitrary, and partial place ; they are on the way to the work of intellect and philosophy in fiction, the novel that watches life, perceives, detects, indeed, but has also the spiritual insight, wisdom as well as knowledge, and not only temperament but passion ; that not only states the problem, but accounts for it.

George Meredith did not pause upon his knowledge of the human heart as though knowledge in itself were a good, he used his science ; nor did he stop upon his emotion over the pain of life, he used his sympathy. He worked much beyond and far above the regions in which the wrangle about art

with a purpose or art without a purpose goes forward. No critic will ever impugn Meredith's transcendent purpose. It is not possible to imagine his prose or poetry without it.

The greatness of Meredith stands unquestionable even in the eyes of those who think it incomplete. Great he was—in thought, in passion, in the art of letters, a student of mankind who sought to help, without consoling, the race he watched, suffering and hoping with that which he studied, as a physician pressing a finger upon a brother's wrist, caring much for the pulse, for the blood, and for the man's life, caring also much for his own science. The incompleteness which so many readers charged against his work is perhaps that it lacks the great and high repose of art which is unconscious of appearances. A great author should be anxious for effect, or the result of his phrase upon the educated ear, but he should be lifted above anxiety for appearances or the result of his phrase upon the untaught. Meredith's prose has not this loftiness, and therefore misses the classic simplicity. He must be afraid of nothing who writes at the greatest heights, and Meredith feared commonplace. Strange fear for so distinguished a mind! But the fear is unmistakable. It appears most plainly in narrative. He will not consent to employ the usual forthright order of words in telling what happened. Even in recounting the order of dialogue, he can hardly bear to use the customary 'he said'—he prefers 'she heard'. This perpetual kind of device mars

the manner of his work only in so far as a fine style can be marred by a little manner, and that is not very far. Generally when we find such a weakness of fear and human respect in literature, it is the companion of a weakness of the whole man—or at any rate of the whole author. But when a great man suffers from this frailty, we gladly recognize the truth that style is a profound thing that cannot gravely suffer from surface habits. Meredith's style is at the foundation of his literature. It has often been said of some author that he has little intellect or power but a good style of writing. Of Meredith we might almost say that he has a magnificent style, yet writes but ill, wild as the paradox may sound. Everything worthy to be called style is his, but the phrase is often tormented, racked, and bent. No other man's writing could keep its strength, its gravity, and its beauty under such a strain. In poetry, where inversion of one kind or another is, by a long convention, in its right home, Meredith's fault of manner is the use of words so strange as to be unknown, but this occurs in none but the later poems. Difficulty in attaining to the full meaning is too great in both the earlier and the later poems, and in the slighter pieces the fancy is too perversely fanciful. A great imagination is Meredith's, but a quibbling fancy.

When Matthew Arnold called poetry a criticism of life, the phrase was taken away from the novel, to which it should belong. Philosophic novelists (there have not been many in the history of English

letters) are the chief critics of human life—social life, civilized life, the life of the race and of races, and that of a man and a woman; even a great novelist who is not a philosopher—Thackeray, for example—is a critic of life in its ethics, its emotions, and its shows; the novelist who is a humorist does his admirable part of criticism. But Meredith in his day took the whole social man into his grasp and his vision. A mere user of his arresting hand and of his searching eyes Meredith was not; he bent all the powers of a vigilant mind and of a human heart upon the study of character. The study was also the creation. Meredith formed the most possible, the most complex, the most complete and least explicable of women and men, now and then varying these vitally-mingled persons by presenting a man who, having one quality only, such as the Egoism of the Egoist, is yet alive with a most indubitable life. George Meredith seldom tells a story of these people—he tells nothing less than their history. What he tells us is so much their history that the error, the sin, or the blunder that draws their fate about them is detected in their youth, traced in their maturity, and finished, early or late, in their doom. No other important student of life, except perhaps George Eliot, has found such visible revenges. He saw them, and he was resolved to show them. His doctrine of consequences seems to stand between that of the Buddhist with his inevitable body of results, and that of the Christian with his directed and decreed retribution.



Meredith's Avenger is an offended Nature or wronged Reason, working by the force of some undecreed law ; nevertheless of a law. Undecreed ; and yet Meredith, by figure of language at any rate, attributes to the visiting and avenging Power now something of formidable indignation and now something of formidable indifference ; and even indifference has to be felt ! Even blindness implies an eye capable of sight ! Meredith had a philosophy of Nature which taught him not—as other students of brute life might suppose—a simple and irresponsible egoism, but self-denial, self-conquest, and unflinching endurance. He would have the individual man to learn the almost unlearnable lesson that his own fate is of no importance. Of no importance to the race others have perceived and pronounced it ; Meredith would have the unit to accept and make his own that interior resignation—if resignation is not too half-hearted a word. All the graver poems too bear this as their principal teaching, and their many lessons rest on this alone. To the apostolate of this doctrine he dedicated his practice of comedy, as well as his heart of tragedy, and the Comic Spirit has no surer mission than to attack the outworks of that self-love within which lurks the condemned desire for personal happiness. Austere doctrine, compared with which the courage of the Stoic is but shallow in its penetration of the soul, is but sparing in its wounding of the heart.

## PESSIMISM IN FICTION

THE told story was not at first used for the purposes of pity, terror, and purification, but mainly for fun. Shall we make a great exception of the Book of Job, the inspired novel all occupied with its subject, the history of a single valuable soul? A family swept out of life are of no moment to that novelist, save as their fate causes the affliction of Job. By and by he shall be comforted with other sons and daughters. These, like the dead ones, are negligible except as sons and daughters to one not negligible man. Never was art truer to a single intention. The earlier family have no names named, but the later receive names because they are to go on living for the final joy of a momentous man.

If we may be permitted (or may be permitted as time goes on) to read Genesis, too, as a divine and all-significant novel, here is an even earlier example of the novel written with the gravest intention, and with simple and economic art. Here the 'stars also' are swept into being as the sons of Job are swept out of it, in a phrase that does not pause upon the universe that was to live, as the phrase did not pause upon the beautiful young men who were to die. The earth is central for that purpose, and Job for this.

But leaving aside, as a digression, the case of

these divine examples of grave fiction, and that of the parables of the Gospel with them, we find an art of story-telling, whether in Arabia or in Tuscany, devised chiefly or altogether for pastime. It is an art of childish origins—the pretending that such or such things came to pass, the making things come to pass at the speaker's whim. It is an arbitrary make-believe and irresponsible, whereas the drama must, as it were, make good its words by making a show. When the novel began in Italy it raised a childish laugh by jests unchildish. Its stories ended happily even though iniquitously. A mere pastime, it filled none but the idlest hour, or the weariest hour of rest. Boccaccio's fictions were proportionate. There was little of them, and they did not encroach. It is a question whether the habit into which we in our time have slipped—fiction as a custom and a habit—is proportionate; and all our modern pastimes are in like manner questionable as to their quantity. And when the pastime of the greater number—the reading of the novel—is charged by the novelist with so many functions as it now carries we cannot but wonder that irresponsible hands should claim, and into those hands should be given, purposes so various and purporting to be so grave.

It is the novelist, then, with no one to whom he must answer, with no facts to which he must be bound, and with only such truths as he sets in secret before his eyes—it is the novelist at whose

discretion lies the power of suggestion that is followed by a million souls. The idle reader opens the novel for pleasure and learns to find that pleasure in painful things. A pessimist has him by the ear, having captured him at the mischief of his idleness and his desire for passive pleasure. On the pessimist author's side also there is some spiritual sloth in his activities, for pessimism is the easier way. If he would confess himself he would tell us that it is so. And one of his fruits is the obvious destruction of comedy, but the other, equally lamentable though less obvious, is the destruction of tragedy.

We have all been troubled by Dante's lack of pity for the people of his infernal pilgrimage. It is true that he has compassion upon Francesca (for the dreadful fact is that he had known as 'a little radiant girl' the very woman whom he saw in eternal woe), but he witnesses unmoved the other wounded displaying before him their immortal wounds and the other miserable recounting to him their immedicable grief. Are we to understand that some misery is beneath living compassion, and that pity and terror do not pass the limits of life's known and intelligible ways, the ways of customary men, where anguish is not cut off from good, and hope, a banished angel, is not abolished? If so, it is easier to understand why the literature of despair is indeed not tragic, why it denies tragedy as comedy itself does not. If pessimism robs us of laughter it has done worse by 'beguiling us of our tears',

not that for its sake they are, but that they are not, shed.

It is no wonder that the proffer of Browning's optimism, half-heartedly made again on the day of his centenary, did again fail. His 'All's right with the world' is as vain as the pessimist's 'All's wrong with it'. It is out of the range of customary life. Intelligible joy and grief are in the midways, and in the midways there is cause for as much sadness as our human hearts can hold. One of the most heart-piercing lines in our poetry is Patmore's

After exceeding ill a little good.

But if the ill had so exceeded that the little good was not, the pierced heart would have closed upon an insensible cicatrice.

Perhaps, by the way, another reason why Browning's remedies are proffered in vain is his denial of fear. Browning refused to submit to fear, at once the penalty and the duty of mankind. Pessimists, on the other hand, are afraid, and they and Browning do not understand one another in their opposition, they are not intelligible enemies. Our pessimists fear, not without cause, and Browning is vociferously hopeful, without full cause. The antagonists are not within touch. And yet that robustious poet is held, or was held by his own generation, to be a realist. In certain evil things he was, on the contrary, an idealist. Having never known such a Spanish friar, or such a Bishop

Blougram, he created them before he detected them—and at such close quarters, so point-blank! He was too intimate with the Sludge he made. But the pessimist, though so partial and so imperfect, is a better realist than he.

A tragedy the noblest and most dreadful of our time—I refer to Monsieur Paul Claudel's drama, *L'Otage*—is the truer antithesis of pessimism in fiction, whether in the story told or on the stage. It is a tale of exceeding ill and a little good, of a world wherewith all is not right. I have lately read a novel in which everything went wrong, and what final solace appears takes the form of a little chatter about a servant's photograph. In Monsieur Claudel's play the solace is in the form of a momentary act of divine death after exceeding ill.

*L'Otage* should be ministered to pessimists, or rather to their readers, for tears, and Mr. Jacobs for laughter. The age is not without its remedies.

## GIACINTO GALLINA

WHEN Giacinto Gallina died at the end of the nineteenth century, at the moment of the high tide of his work for the Venetian stage, English people were put into possession of some idea of his drama in the readiest way at hand. Gallina was said to be, more or less, a later Goldoni with a warmer heart. This was a brief description—or rather a mere sign—of an author whom few strangers would ever seek to know better. He is, indeed, so barred out of the knowledge of English readers by his frequent use of dialect that some such phrase was necessary as a first and final *mémoire*. It gave the news of his death with a first mention of his name and a compendious definition of his career, in one sentence.

Gallina certainly followed Goldoni in finding the arguments, action, and passions of his plays in the home life of the Venetians—a life more domestic than anything an English dramatist would have the courage to offer to a self-conscious public inclined to ‘humour’. Although our countrymen are much afraid lest men should accuse them of exceeding domesticity, and are inclined to defend themselves with irony, they are in fact less domestic than any of their neighbours. You may hear two young Italian men, of what would be called among

ourselves with some pride the frivolous world, exchange reports of the state and progress of their children (their babies really, but one hardly dares to say so ; and one's reluctance denotes the peculiar insular sense of dignities and indignities, the reserve, and the clowning that covers its hasty retreat). One hesitates, for fear of burlesque, to report in English a conversation that is in Italy quite simple, human, and unconnected with any kind of raillery.

If this almost majestic candour is found in ' the world ', the home is at least equally important in the classes whereof Goldoni chiefly wrote, and Giacinto Gallina in succession to him. These middle classes are very homely, and also peculiarly Italian. Nothing quite so local is to be found among the very poor, whose customs are those of necessity all the world over, and whose manners are small ; the rich also tend to resemble each other, luxury grows monotonous, and cookery, for example, is as French in a good hotel in Athens as in a good hotel in Rome. But the little professional world everywhere in Italy keeps deep and inner places wherein it is Italian, Italian beyond the ken of the traveller, and beyond the reach of alteration. The same thing that makes so much of Goldoni and of Gallina illegible to the rest of Europe encloses that sequestered home, and this is dialect. Business, especially if it be official, the business of an *impiegato*, is done in choice Italian, and all acquaintance with foreigners



(which in these classes is not much) uses the same polite manner of speech. 'Toscaneggia'—'he tuscanizes'—says one provincial of another, bantering the choice of words and the careful conjugations of verbs which he himself also will put on with the dignities of office.

But within the flat, within the *palazzo*, within the country *villino* alike, dialect has its nest of intimacy, and makes all speech homely with an intensity of homeliness that people without patois can hardly conceive. It sets up an understanding, it runs up a code of signals, it makes confidence, and is heard in a laugh. Habit has not blunted the people's sense of their locality of speech, even as it has left them the full consciousness of their sun. The barbarisms of local dialect are to the Italian citizens snug (as Swift would say) beyond description: their speech closes in their gossip, it prompts their allusions, it interprets, it understands, at close quarters. It is a kind of refuge from the generalities of literature; it consoles the heart from the threats of the preacher. But it scolds as no other kind of language can scold: scolds the servants with an equality of expression and a tyranny of oppression together that makes one of the curiosities of Italian domestic life; it scolds with the peculiar fury of the southern kitchen—a fury that casts itself implicitly upon the fellow-feeling of bystanders for excuse in the future time of calm. Dialect, in fine, sustains, comforts, winks, excludes the burden of the

unintelligible world, deprecates, assuages; it keeps up the old, old habits of childhood, it knows the things that the citizen and the citizen's wife know best, it is aloof from politics.

Inasmuch as the little professional classes of the South do not live without society, their dialect associates them closely with their neighbours—closely yet without any defect of ceremony. The rites are as many, the farewells are as repeated, as though Tuscan were the language; and the speakers of a comparatively gross dialect, full of twang, are yet not people to spend their evenings in ungraceful isolation. Their domesticity is not of the English kind that is made by the habit of reading, and dialect dispenses them from none of the duties and dignities of entertainment. It is only that all is done within, within certain bonds of concentrated mutual understanding.

Indeed, the necessity of companionship for every evening causes a very courteous waiving of the differences of rank. The general asks the village druggist (who is also the barber), and all others of like condition, to his country house to play tombola, there being no other neighbours, or but few. The intercourse between them is that of perfectly equal and easy courtesy, the only sign of difference being the use of the address 'eccellenza' on one side only, but with the infrequency of natural good manners. Without dialect you could hardly have an understanding so close yet so decorous.

Even a remote dialect serves this intimate purpose. It was my fortune to know in childhood the inner interior of such a house. Genoese was my own tongue, and the barber's, and all the countryside's, and the General's was Modenese. His Modenese and his wife's had never abated a jot, for all their many years of dwelling in Liguria; as for their Italian, it was singularly exquisite (the General's recitation of Dante was the most perfect speech in the world), but it was not forthcoming for their tombola parties. Modenese met the quite alien Genoese in a kind of rivalry of historic provincialism. Hosts and guests understood each other barely, and the hard Modenese consonants snapped in reply to the Ligurian sing-song; but it was at any rate dialect, it was *noi altri*, it was the strong Italian home.

That the women should have their interests in these narrow things—narrow but not dull—is intelligible enough. Many of the older women remain indoors from Sunday noon to the next Sunday morning, in a jacket and slippers; not a few of the younger have their distractions, romances, emotions, at the window. Poverty, moreover, fosters these customs by forbidding much toilette, and thus the Italian woman of these middle classes, and of remote towns, who always dresses *much*, is content to dress *seldom*, and this perforce means a habit of home-keeping. But the men, with the slight alternative of the *caffè*, are equally absorbed by the

things of the house. So does Goldoni show them to be in the whole series of his plays, and so must the men of his audience have been in the eighteenth century, or they would not have endured this perpetual comedy of domestic affairs, in the least exalted sense of the word domestic. Venetian men, and the citizens of other cities equally noble, sat to see the play that turns chiefly on the strife of a man's mother and his wife for the services of a single maid, and they sit to-day to see the same thing. Giacinto Gallina, too, has half a comedy occupied with that contention. He need hardly—but for its unflagging popularity—have taken the self-same motive, inasmuch as Goldoni is by no means out of date; he holds the stage as freshly as ever. Indeed, Italian women, except in the richer classes that have international examples more constantly before their eyes, alter little in a matter of a hundred or two hundred years. In the women of Goldoni and in the women of Giacinto Gallina you may see the virtual contemporaries of Mrs. Samuel Pepys and of Mercer.

## THE SECOND PERSON SINGULAR

THE cause of the modern monotony of 'you' might be sought in the mere slovenliness of our civilization in the practice of the inflexions of grammar. All things tend to become specialized, except only words. Though in the house of life itself the organs, as life grows more perfect, begin to draw apart to their own separate functions; though the labourer, in the later association of mankind, finds his task by degrees to dwindle in range and to be enforced within closer and closer repetitions; and though only a small division of any of the sciences that have come towards adult and responsible age falls to the share of a single specialist, the word alone grows not expert and special, but general and inexpert.

It is obliged to do more various things, and to do them with less directness and, as it were, a less sequestered intention. It is engaged upon enterprises of unskilled labour. The industrial word has less and less craft, less dignity, less leisure, less rest, and more mere utility.

Moreover, it loses, in the workaday life, its own varieties, amid the varieties of the casual task. It changes not its vesture, and the inflexion is lost.

Why it is that some, at least, of the civilized peoples, in the inevitable evolution of things,

should tend to become poor, careless, and inexact grammarians it is hard to understand. The fact is, needless to say, well enough known. Some of the French missionaries, students of American-Indian languages, have astonished us with reports of the enormous vocabularies and the scientific order of those tongues. The people are in the nomadic stage of society, their languages in the finished, the special, the sub-divided condition; intricate in system, organic, arranged, logical, full of expressive differences, cases that precisely assign action, and tenses that deal finely with time, turning the future to look upon the past, and anticipating that turn, and making a shifting perspective of the past; distinguishing persons not merely by pointing the rude forefinger of a pronoun, but by the allusion of all the inflexions of a verb. All that the antique grammars did, and more, is done, we hear, by those doomed languages of an unaltering people, a people with neither literature nor history, a people whose antiquities have no interest nor value, nor date, because their centuries resembled each other.

Not only the tactics of grammar, but an innumerable variety of words is theirs, so that a speaker might hardly name a common thing without a conscious play of choice, according as the syllables of a sentence were to fold and close. Rhythmic prose is hardly possible, when it has the charge of thought, without some degree of

a like liberty of choice, and modern prose in all languages has, obviously, for the lack of this liberty—for lack of rich alternatives—somewhat forgone the practice of rhythm; forgone it altogether in the explanations of science, for instance, or the processes of reasoning. A Red-Indian speech, translated even into sentimental English, as used formerly to be done, must have undergone a sorry process, and a yet sorrier change when it was done into sentimental French.

It is, however, among English races chiefly that an unwillingness to be troubled with the distinctions of grammar has had this effect of making a word run errands and serve the first purpose at hand; and it is among English races that inflexions (never very numerous or subtle) have been neglected and let fall. That most orderly of grammars, the Spanish, is still in full use; the Italians keep all their inflexions nominally, use them all in Tuscany, use a certain number in Rome, retain as few as possible in Liguria—making shift with auxiliary verbs rather than conjugate properly, everywhere except in the Tuscan districts. The French go about to avoid certain of their own subjunctives, even in literature, and in speech the perfect tenses are passed askance, for fear of pedantry. None but ourselves have been so impatient as to put out of common use the second person singular. ‘You’ was manifestly a trick of politeness in all languages, until it became

depreciated by general use, when Germans, Spaniards, and Italians sought for a yet more distant pronoun of courtesy.

The literary Genius was kind to its wayward chosen people, and kept for us a plot of the language apart for the phrase of piety and poetry. As things are, we need not envy the French their second person singular. For them it has but two keen significances—the first use in love and the disuse in the reproof of children. The second is, perhaps, the more important; it is renewed, and loses nothing of its pain by recurrence. To say ‘vous’ to a naughty child is to enforce insatiate retribution; few children deserve so much justice, for this is a rebuke that touches the personality, and alters the relations of life.

As to that other occasion, first-mentioned, it is by no means certain that the second person singular, with its single delight—the first—never to be renewed, has not to answer for the vulgar regrets of the world for the flights of its joys. ‘Toi’, the first ‘toi’, is an arbitrary, a conventional happiness, a happiness because it is single—it has no quality but that. The ‘many thousand’ of ‘toi’ are insignificant, and therefore it has no ‘poor last’; it sets a paltry example, therefore.

And then, while the second person singular plays this ambiguous part in love, see how primly it is eschewed in prayer. ‘May your name be sanctified’ is a second phrase of the *oraison*



*dominicale* (*oraison dominicale*! the name says everything) which we should be loth to have in place of our own. With us there is not only the poetic 'thy', but the obsolete valuing of the last syllable of the past participle—'hallowed'—and the unworn, the still fresh word itself to make the sentence beautiful. Decidedly, if we took such words into familiar use we should gain much, but we should lose a most distinctive characteristic, bestowed upon us by the literary Genius, as though in reward of our very sins—our unique plot of disregarded language that the traffic of the world passes by. For though the Italians have a poetic Italian, the differences of this with their daily prose are rather in the form of the words than in the words themselves. Now the French have the Psalms of David in the language of the trade circular charged with a little rhetoric.

As to our civilized sloth in neglecting rules, and its effectual influence in effacing them, it could not be more distinctly proved than by the Quaker speech. Restoring the second person singular to the language (by way of denying the primitive hyperbole of courtesy from which the general second person plural took its use), the followers of Penn restored none of the inflexions. Or if for a generation or so these were in practice, yet the increase of carelessness and the generalizing habit of speech in a world more and more intent upon special tasks in all things else, quickly made an

end of them. So that Quakerism began to talk a horrible grammar unknown to the Gentiles. If Mrs. Beecher Stowe makes Quakers speak according to their use, they suppressed 'thou' more or less, and would neither decline nor conjugate. Nothing but the slovenly indifference that has made all our verbs so dull could be the cause of this perversion of a reform.

Like to the Quaker grammarians are certain of our own poets, who seem to find a difficulty in carrying the second person singular safely through a stanza. If one verb agrees in order, ten to one there is another, a little more out of sight, that does not. As Shelley wrote—

Thou lovest, but ne'er knew love's sad satiety,  
so write others of the moderns.

Nevertheless, it is not excusable. It was not done in the other centuries. Must we needs, as we go on, grow so lax, and do these unhandsome things? If we do by some obscure process grow so lax, why should there not be, in a time of revisions, a revision of these customs? A little of the subjunctive was restored many years ago by Mr. Henley in the *National Observer*; that this little soon fell aside again is not encouraging; nevertheless, 'it were' worth while for some author, unencouraged, to recall, responsibly, the second person singular, and with it certain tenses long out of use.

There might be such a literary restoration—a literary and a familiar restoration—as would make our language again more various and more charming, and yet would not turn the speech poetic to vulgar use, nor decrease the dignity of what Jeremy Taylor at his prayers called ‘the essential and ornamental measures of address’.

Whatever our slovenly ways with ordinary grammar, we have the treasure of the sequestered poetic and religious language in good order and perfect syntax. And our advantage of the two derivations may well be dwelt upon afresh, now when so many of our writers are obsequious to the French language. (How is it, by the way, that Ireland is so little joyful for the gift of English?) French cannot be the great poetic language, in spite of the opinion of Louis Blanc, delivered from a grandfatherly hearth-rug: ‘L’anglais et le français; ce sont les deux langues qui resteront; l’anglais pour le commerce, le français pour la littérature.’ The blood of a silent listener was only ten years old, but it boiled. And here is a less arrogant but quite characteristic French judgement upon Browning: ‘What a singular man! his middle is not in the centre.’ That Frenchman discovered a racial fact. The middle of an English poet is not in the centre; it is one focus of an ellipse, like the sun. Our national imagination takes wide adventures and unequal velocities. It was once thought (before Kepler)

that the earth's orbit must be circular, because a circle is 'perfect'. And this is the kind of perfection, in another region of thoughts, that the French mind has long cherished.

Not only in this matter of middles and centres is English poetry out of bounds. She does not know when she is beaten, as was said of English armies. Excluded by rules, how does she elbow her way in? Into great drama she intrudes, bidding the stage to wait; by lyre and song she commands epic narrative to halt the marching columns of its processions; waves rhetoric from its right throne in the grand style and in heroic verse, and usurps its place by an imperial supersession; scatters literary boundaries, and makes all the kingdoms hers—Poetry's. And no imaginable academies could have prevailed against her.

French lacks much besides those alien powers, our Latin and Teutonic inheritances, forbidden as it is to thunder from opposite heavens, with the Danube between, or the Alps between.

It lacks also negatives worth having; making shift with half-hearted particles or the grotesquely insufficient *peu*. *Peu* is the only negative for some of the most energetic adjectives. Meanwhile we have our profound and powerful particle, in our 'undone', 'unloved' 'unforgiven', the 'un' that summons in order that it may banish, and keeps the living word present to hear sentence and denial, showing the word 'unloved' to be not less than archangel ruined.

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